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saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE
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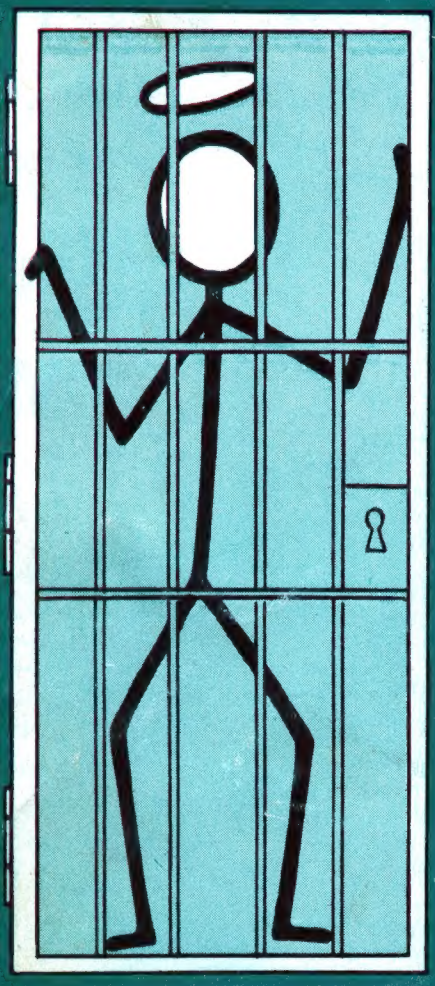
Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



IN THIS ISSUE

JULIAN SYMONS

AUGUST DERLETH

RUFUS KING

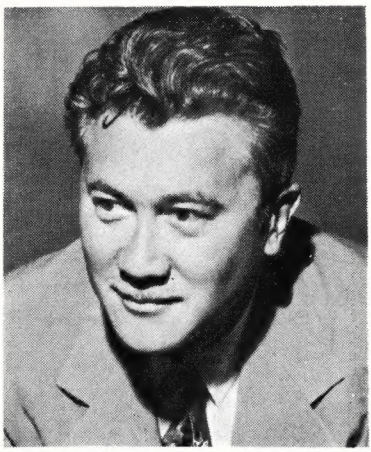
Q. PATRICK

LESLIE CHARTERIS

Instructions for Murder

A New Story by LAWRENCE TREAT

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



Aside from the grand classical crimes which usually involve a satisfying amount of violence, like murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, and revolution, the sleepless self-appointed improvers of public morals have kindly enlarged the landscape of adventure and mystery writers by inventing several new felonies with little or no foundation in religion, tradition, ethics, or logic, but which provide rich enough rewards to be worth fighting over.

Probably the most notorious example of this art of creating crime was the "noble experiment" of Prohibition in the United States. With one wave of the legal wand, a formerly respectable traffic was turned over to outlaws, gang leaders seized power and battled like feudal barons, an overwhelming majority of hitherto honest citizens became enthusiastic co-conspirators and accessories, and instead of being enriched by excise taxes the Government was obliged to spend more money on enforcement officers who were usually either corrupt themselves or completely hamstrung by corruption at higher levels. But a bonanza was thrown open to authors, dramatists, and show producers which some of them are still cashing in on.

After liquor was restored to grace, the wealth and organization which the Underworld had built up during its franchise turned to other activities which zealous legislators were offering it on a platter, of which one of the most attractive was another prohibition at least as idiotic as that of fermented beverages: gambling. To an English gentleman who has always had "his" bookie as openly and as naturally as he has his tailor or his lawyer, it would be hard to explain why it should be perfectly moral to bet on a horse at the track, but immoral to do so by telephone. And the inhabitant of any country which has a State lottery, which means virtually every civilized free nation on earth outside the United States, would be totally nonplussed by the American's perturbation about the "numbers racket" and the unscrupulous villains who run it, as soon as he discovered that it is merely a sort of illicit penny-ante lottery: he would be unable to understand why the Government didn't take it over, run it properly, and make the profit.

But lest I seem to be picking especially on the US, let me hasten to say that the U. S. did not originate this kind of stupidity. Nor did USSR. It goes back much further.

In the course of some research I was doing for an article for a non-competitive American magazine, GOURMET, I recently serendipped the priceless item that the ancient Romans were no less addicted than modern Italians to a kind of spicy sausage, which however became ritually identified with the Lupercalian and Floralian orgies. So when the Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity (about 313 AD) he issued an edict forbidding the manufacture and eating of sausages. His people reacted exactly as you would expect, and the business of sausage-legging was born, of which bootlegging turns out to be only an upstart modernization. In those days, a hot dog could be hot in one more sense than we have to cope with today.

But don't let's feel too smug. It could happen again.

Cecil Charles

THE
saint
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1963
VOL. 18, NO. 6

The Covetous Headsman 3
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Instructions For Murder 26
by LAWRENCE TREAT

Death Before Breakfast 37
by Q. PATRICK

The Case of the Pleasant Strangers 43
by RUFUS KING

The Days of September 61
by JULIAN SYMONS

The Man in the Alley 73
by EDWARD D. HOCH

Black Mercury 91
by TERENCE ROBERTS

What's New in Crime 111
by STEFAN SANTESSON

Pattern 112
by ARTHUR PORGES

Dear Grace 116
by AUGUST DERLETH

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663

the covetous headsman

by Leslie Charteris

"I HOPE, Monsieur Templar," said Inspector Archimede Quercy, of the Paris *Police Judiciaire,* in passable English, "that you will not think this meeting is unfriendly."

"Nevertheless," Simon replied, in perfect French, "to be summoned here on my very first day in Paris seems at least an unusual distinction."

"The Saint is an unusual personage," said Inspector Quercy, reverting gratefully to his native tongue.

He was a long, thin man with a long, thin nose, and even with rather long, thin hair. He had a solemn, anxious face and wistful eyes like a questioning spaniel. Simon knew that that appearance was deceptive. It was the Saint's business, in the cause of outlawry, to know the reputations of many police officers in many places; and he knew that on the record Inspector Quercy's instincts, if the canine parallel must be continued, leaned more

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It is, to me, a somewhat awe-inspiring realization that when you read this THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE will be just ten years old. On that epochal day in 1953 when I proudly handled one of the first copies from the bindery (it was dated simply "Spring", for at the launching a quarterly was all we could aspire to) I would not have dared to assume that we would still be running a decade later. Yet here we are, still going strong in spite of some strange vicissitudes and one grim hiatus in which we almost foundered, a regular monthly since the start of our second year, still posing no threat to the biggest sellers in the magazine field, but blessed with one of the loyalest and, we think, most distinguished followings of readers.

I feel we can be pardoned if we reprint this month, sort of commemoratively, this story which I wrote brand-new for that first trepidant issue, which those who joined us at the very start may almost have forgotten. L. C.

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towards those of the bloodhound, the retriever, and the bulldog.

"If you come here as a simple tourist," Quercy said, "France welcomes you. We have, as you well know, a beautiful country, good food, good wine, and pretty girls. They are all at your disposal—for you, no doubt, have plenty of those good American dollars which France so badly needs. But as the Saint—that would be altogether different."

"Monsieur the Inspector is, perhaps, anti-clerical?" Simon suggested gravely.

"I refer, Monsieur, to the *nom de guerre* under which you are so widely known. I have not, it is true, been informed of any charges pending against you anywhere, nor have the police of any other country requested me to arrest you for extradition; but I have read about your exploits. Your motives are popularly believed to be idealistic, in a peculiar way. That is not for me to judge. I only tell you that we want none of them here."

"What, no ideals—in the *Palais de Justice*?"

Quercy sighed.

He gazed across his littered desk into the dancing blue eyes under quizzically tilted brows, and for a moment the lugubriousness in his own gaze was very deep and real. The sight of the tall broad-shouldered figure sprawled with such impudent grace in his shabby armchair made a mockery of the conventional stiffness of the room, just as the casual elegance of its clothing affronted the hardworn dilapidation of the furniture; the warm bronze of the preposterously handsome face seemed to bring its own sun into the dingy r o o m , whispering outlandish heresies of open skies and wide places where the wind blew; and because of this man the office seemed more cramped and drab and dustier than ever, and the gloom of it touched the soul of its proper occupant. It was a sensation that many other policemen had had when they came face to face with that last amazing heir to the mantle of Robin Hood, when they knew it was their turn to try to tame him and realised the immensity of the task. . . .

"I mean," s a i d Inspector Quercy patiently, "that there are servants of the Republic, of whom I am one, employed here to concern themselves with crime. If you, as an individual, acquire knowledge of any crime or criminals, we shall be glad to receive your information, but we do not allow private persons to take over the duties of the police. Still less do we permit anyone to administer his own interpretation of justice, as I hear you have sometimes claimed to do. Furthermore I must warn you that here, under the *Code Na-*

poleon, you would not have the same advantage that you have enjoyed in England and America. There, you are legally innocent until you are proved guilty: here, with sufficient grounds, you may be placed on trial and required to prove yourself innocent."

The Saint smiled.

"I appreciate the warning," he murmured. "But the truth is, I did come here for the food, the wine, and the pretty girls. I hadn't thought of giving you any trouble." The devil in him couldn't resist adding, "——so far."

"Let it remain that way, Monsieur. A vacation does everyone good."

Simon offered a cigarette, and struck a light for them both.

"Now that I know how you feel about me," he remarked, "I suppose I ought to thank you for not trying to pin that Rosepierre murder on me. It must have taken great restraint not to grab such a ready-made scapegoat."

He had been reading the story in a newspaper at breakfast. The body of a young man identified as Charles Rosepierre had been found murdered in the Bois de Boulogne, the spacious park adjacent to the most fashionable residential quarter of Paris. There appeared to be no clue to the murderer, or even to the motive, for he was a respectable clerk in a shipping office, vouched for by his employers as honest and hard-working and by his friends and associates as being sober and amiable and impossible to connect with any shady acquaintances.

He carried very little money, but he had not been robbed. He had left the office at the usual time on the day he died, apparently with no apprehensions, and it was understood that he was going to have dinner and call later on the girl he was courting; but he had not been seen since until his body was found a few yards from one of the roads through the park. There was no hint of a jealous rival, nor did anything in his open commonplace life give any grounds to believe in a crime of passion; yet a passion of some weird kind must have been involved. For what lent the crime the eerie touch of horror that justified the space allotted to it in the press was the fact that although he had died almost instantly from a knife stab in the heart, his head had been severed from his body *after he was dead,* and was found where it had presumably rolled a few feet away.

"I might have thought of you," Quercy said, without the ghost of a smile, "if Rosepierre's body had not been found two hours before your plane landed at Orly. When he was killed and

his head was being cut off, there is no doubt that you were halfway over the Atlantic."

"It was clever of me to arrive with a cast-iron alibi. You really have no ideas about how I could have faked it?"

"I am satisfied, Monsieur, that that would be beyond even your powers."

"One day I must figure out how it could be done," said the Saint; and in some incredible way he made it sound possible.

The Inspector grunted.

"You have not, perhaps, any more constructive suggestions about the mystery?"

"I read a detective story once with a decapitated body in it, in which the head was actually taken from an entirely different body, the object being to confuse the police and no doubt the readers too."

"The medical examination, in this case, proves positively that the head which was found did indeed belong to the body."

"A big part of your problem, then, seems to be to find an answer to why anyone who had already killed someone, for whatever reason, should afterwards take the trouble to cut off his head. It was not done to prevent identification, because the head was left there."

"Exactly."

Simon gazed at the ceiling.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, "the name of the victim is a clue. Is it possible that you have in Paris some demented aristocrat who is still nursing a grudge for the treatment given to his ancestors during the Revolution? He has made a vow to track down and take vengeance on the lineal descendants of the revolutionary leaders who gave his forbears the radical haircut. Mistaking the name of this unfortunate young man for Robespierre, and having no guillotine handy, he ——"

There came, perhaps providentially, a knock on the door, and an *agent* entered.

"Mademoiselle North est ici, Monsieur l'Inspector."

"Good. I will see her at once. It is the sister of the murdered man," he explained to the Saint.

"Then why is her name North?"

"She was adopted as a child by an American family. It is quite a story." Quercy stood up. "But I must not detain you any longer. He held out his hand. "Amuse yourself well, Monsieur Templar, and remember what I have told you."

"I will do my best," said the Saint, and wondered even to himself just what he meant.

He took a long look at the girl who was entering as he went out. She was American, obviously, in every outward particular, stamped unmistakably with all the details of dress and grooming

that label the American product to a sophisticated glance anywhere. And since a pretty face is a pretty face in any country within the same broad ethnic limits, there was nothing about her features to mark her as conspicuously French by birth. She had softly waved black hair and clear brown eyes and a wide mouth which in happier circumstances, the Saint's instinct told him, could be generous in many ways.

Simon carried the image of her vividly in his mind as he retraced his way through the musty labyrinth of the upper floors and down the ancient winding stairway to the street. He stood at the gates of the courtyard for a few moments, indulging himself in indecision, and knowing all the time that his decision was already made. There was a sidewalk cafe on the other side of the boulevard. He crossed it and sat down at a table from which he could watch the entrance of the building he had just left.

And so, he reflected cheerfully, it was going to happen to him again.

It was true, as he had told Quercy, that he hadn't come to Paris with any intention of getting into trouble. He seldom went anywhere with the intention of getting into trouble. But trouble had that disastrous propensity for getting into him. It was, of course, originally Quercy's fault for ordering him to report at the Prefecture. The summons had been most courteously phrased, but it had been an order, just the same. The Saint had an unpardonably rebellious attitude towards all orders, especially police orders. That had prepared the ground. And then the Inspector had rashly proceeded to plant a seed. It was not that Simon could legitimately resent his warning, which had been most discreetly and even benevolently phrased; but nevertheless it had the ingredients of a challenge. The Saint had never found it easy to leave a challenge alone. And, unfortunately, there was an intriguing murder mystery immediately to hand for fertiliser. Even so, he might have been able to resist; but then he had seen the girl. It was harder still for him to leave a pretty girl alone. And hadn't Quercy himself invited him to enjoy the pretty girls? And so upon fertilizer and seed and cultivated ground, to conclude the metaphor, had fallen the warm rain of her presence; and the result was inevitable, as it had always been. . . .

The Saint ordered a Suze, paid for it at once so that he could leave at any moment, and waited.

An hour passed before she came out, and he got up and

threaded his way nonchalantly through the traffic. She stood outside the Palais, looking hopefully up and down the street for a taxi, and Simon timed his crossing so that he arrived beside her as one came by, and their hands met on the door handle.

The looked at each other with surprise, confusion, and incipient hostility normal to any two people caught in such a deadlock, the Saint playing his part exactly as if the accident was none of his making; and then he smiled.

"A photo finish," he said. "Shall we flip for it, or are we lucky enough to be going the same way?"

She smiled back—he had counted on the sound of a familiar accent to earn that.

"I'm going to my hotel—the George Cinq."

"Mine too," said the Saint truthfully, although his answer would have been the same whatever she had said.

As the cab turned along the Quai des Grands Augustins he knew that she was looking at him more closely.

"Didn't I just see you in that detective's office?" she asked.

"I didn't think you noticed," he said. "But I saw you."

"Are you a reporter?"

He considered the possibilities of the role for an instant.

"No."

"Are you connected with the police?"

Intuition, which had been whispering to him, raised its voice to a sure command. At this moment, in this situation, with this girl, the truth would gain him more than any fiction.

"My name is Simon Templar."

"The Saint."

She was one of those people whom he met all too seldom, who could hear his name and recognise its connotation without gasping, swooning, or recoiling; and at first, he was glad to see, she received it even without fear. "The Saint," she said, looking at him with no more than ordinary curiosity; and then the fear barely began to stir in her eyes.

"No, darling," he said quickly. "I didn't kill your brother. Even Quercy will vouch for that. He knows I was in an airplane over the Atlantic at the time.

"Do you suspect me?"

"Did you do it?"

"I was on the Atlantic, too. On a boat. I landed at Cherbourg this morning. A policeman was waiting for me at the George Cinq."

"Don't let anyone tell you these cops aren't efficient. They sent for me almost as quickly."

Simon lighted a cigarette and gave his hunch one last retrospective survey, for the duration of a long inhalation. His mind was made up.

He said: "This is on the level. Quercy had me in his office, giving me a solemn warning to keep my nose clean while I'm here. So I just naturally have an unholy desire to make a monkey out of him. I like you. And your brother's case is the hottest thing on Quercy's blotter right now. If I could break it and hand him the pieces on a platter, it'd be a magnificent moment. And I'm sure you want the case solved, whoever does it. So will you let me help—if I can?"

Her straightforward dark eyes studied him for many seconds.

She said: "Thank you. I like you, too. But what can you do?"

"I may think of something. First, I've got to know everything you can tell me. May I take you to lunch?"

"Yes. But I've got to stop at the hotel first. They didn't even give me time to see my room."

In the lobby, while she was asking for her key, a man stepped up beside her at the desk, removed a rich black homburg with a slight flourish, and said: "Pardon, Miss North." He extended a card. Looking over her shoulder, Simon saw that it said "M. Georges Olivant," with an address in St. Cloud.

"I 'ave waited for you all zis morning," Olivant said. "I am an old friend of your fahzer. I would 'ave met you at ze boat, but I was unable to leave Paris because of business."

He was a stout man with a face that unhappily was reminiscent of a well-fed rat, although the only fur on it was a carefully trimmed black moustache, the rest of the skin having that glossy pink patina which can only be produced by the best barbers. From the points of his polished shoes, up through his studiously tailored blue suit and studiously manicured fingernails, to the top of his pomaded head, he exuded an aroma of cologne and solid prosperity. He spoke English in an aggressive way which somehow gave the impression that he was extremely proud of his accent, which was atrocious. And just as the Saint had liked Valerie North at first glance, from the first glance he disliked M. Olivant.

"This is quite a surprise," the girl was saying politely. "How did you know about me, and how did you find me so quickly?"

"I read about your trip in ze newspaper," Olivant said. "So of course I am waiting for you. Eet was not difficult. Zere are not so many 'otels in Paris where ze Americans descend."

She seemed to take the reference to a newspaper story on her trip so matter-of-factly that a tiny line creased between the Saint's brows. Her name had meant nothing to him, and he

thought he was aware of most celebrities.

"Then you must have known my brother," the girl said.

"Alas, no. I am in Belgium, on business, when I read ze newspaper. It is ze first I 'ear of you bose since ze war. I mean to look for 'im, of course. But as soon as I return, before I can look, I read in ze newspaper about 'im again, and 'e is dead." Olivant allowed an expression of grief to dwell on his face for a measured period of time, and then bravely set it aside. "'Owever, I come to place myself at your service. For finding ze murderers, we can only 'ope ze police 'ave success. But anysing else I can do . . . You will, per'aps 'ave lunch wiz me?"

The girl's eyes went to the Saint, and Simon made a faint negative movement with his head.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I've already promised. . . . May I introduce Mr. ——"

"Tombs," said the Saint promptly holding out his hand.

The same kind of impulse that had made him introduce himself with complete candour to Valerie North now made him duck behind the alias which often afforded him a morbid amusement; but this time his inward smile vanished abruptly as Olivant shook hands. From a man who looked like Olivant, he had expected a fleshy and probably moist and limp contact; but the palm that touched his own was hard and rough like a labourer's.

Deep in the Saint's brain a little premonitory pulse began to beat, like the signal of some psychic Geiger counter; but his face was a mask of conventional amiability.

"Mr. Tombs," Olivant repeated, like a man who made a practice of memorising names. "Zen per'aps bose of you——"

"I don't want to be rude," said the Saint firmly, "but my job depends on this exclusive interview. You know how newspapers are."

M. Olivant made a visible effort to look like a man who knew how newspapers are.

"I am desolate." He turned back to the girl. "For cocktails, zen, per'aps? I 'ave look forward so much to zis meeting——"

"Excuse me," said the Saint.

He strolled across the lobby to the little news-stand and glanced quickly over its wares. A guide book with a shiny stiff paper cover caught his eye, and he bought it, and wiped the cover briskly with his handkerchief while he waited for his change. He walked back, holding the book by one corner, to where M. Olivant was taking his talkative leave of Valerie North.

"I come 'ere, zen, at five o'clock. I 'ave so much to tell you about your poor fahzer and what

'e does for us in ze Resistance before ze Gestapo take 'im. . . . To sink I 'ave not see you since you were such a leetle girl!"

"I'll look forward to it," said the girl self-consciously, letting her hand be kissed, and looked at the Saint. "May I run upstairs just for a minute and see my room before we go?"

"Sure."

As she left, Simon showed M. Olivant his book, holding it in such a way that the other was practically forced to take it.

"M. Olivant, would you say this was any good?"

Olivant took the book and thumbed perfunctorily through a few pages.

"Eet is probably quite 'elpful, Mr. Tombs. So you don't work 'ere all ze time?"

"No; this is a special assignment."

"Ah. I 'ope you make a good story."

"At least it's a chance to travel," said the Saint conversationally. "But I don't suppose that means much to you. From what you were saying, it sounds as if you spent most of your time doing it. What sort of business are you in?"

"I 'ave many affairs," Olivant said impressively, and seemed to think that was an adequate answer.

He held out the book, and Simon took it back again by the corner.

"Maybe you'd let me talk to you later, Monsieur Olivant. You should have some interesting things to tell about Miss North's family."

"Ah, yes, eet is a most interesting story." Olivant seemed curiously uninterested. He extended his hand briskly. "Now, I 'ave anozzer appointment. Eet 'as been a pleasure to meet you. *Au revoir*, Mr. Tombs."

The Saint watched him go, with the sensation of that inappropriately calloused hand lingering on his fingers; and then he turned to the concierge and asked for a large envelope, into which he slid his newly-acquired guidebook, being careful not to touch the book again except by the one corner he was holding it by.

"Tell me," said the Saint, "as the most ignorant reporter in this town, what put you in the news? I mean, even before anything happened to your brother."

They sat in opposite armchairs across a table in the tiny downstairs room of the Restaurant Chataignier, sniffing the savoury bouquet of its incomparable *homard au beurre blanc* rising from the plates in front of them, while the chef and proprietor himself uncorked a bottle of cool *rose*.

"It sounds silly," said Valerie North, "but I was on one of those radio quiz programmes. I hap-

pened to know the answer to who was the painter of the Mona Lisa, and the prize I won was a free trip to Europe. They asked me what I planned to do with it, and I said it'd give me a chance I'd always hoped for to get to know my brother."

"It does sound a little unusual," Simon admitted. "Hadn't you ever met?"

"Not since we were kids. We were born and lived here, till 1940, when the Germans were advancing on Paris. I was too young to remember much about it, but everyone was very frightened, and my father said we must go away. He wouldn't go himself, but he sent us with the wife of a neighbour—my mother died when we were very young. Somewhere on the road we were strafed by a plane, and the woman was killed. Charles and I went on alone."

"Was he older or younger than you?"

"Two years older. But we were both children. Somehow, presently, we got separated. I just went on, helplessly, I guess, with the stream of refugees who were trudging away to the southwest. Somewhere, after that—it all seems so far away and confused—I was picked up by an American couple who'd also been caught in the blitz. They took me to Bordeaux, and then afterwards to America. They were sweet people—they still are—and they hadn't any children, and they treated me like their own. Later on, they were able to find out somehow that my father had died in a concentration camp. They adopted me legally, and I took their name."

"So, for all practical purposes, you really are an American?"

"I went to school in Chicago—Mr. North is an accountant there—and now I'm a secretary in a mail-order house. And the only French I know is from high school."

"Who was your father?"

"All I know about him is his name, Eli Rosepierre. And he was some sort of working jeweller."

The Saint paused with his wine-glass half-way to his lips.

"Was he Jewish?"

"I think so."

"I told Quercy there might be something in the name," he observed. "Of course, the name Eli fixes it. Now I get the Rosepierre. A literal translation of Rosenstein. I wonder. . . . He must have been very brave or very foolish to stay here with the Nazis coming."

"Perhaps he was only too optimistic," she said. "You know, I'd never thought of that, about the name."

"Was he rich?"

"I don't think so. He worked very hard. But he may have been thrifty. I don't really know. As far as I can remember we lived

in an ordinary decent way, not poverty-stricken and not specially luxurious."

"But it's at least a possibility."

"What difference does it make? Whatever he had, the Nazis must have confiscated."

"If they could find it."

"I suppose," she said, "you're looking for a motive."

"There must be one. And I've got to find it."

She watched him sub-dividing the last succulent pieces of lobster with loving regret.

"When did you locate your brother again?" he asked.

"Only a few months ago. The Norths had tried from time to time, without any luck. Last winter I thought I'd try just once more on my own. I had an advertisement translated into French and sent it to all the Paris newspapers. Of course, for all I knew, he might have been anywhere else in France, if he was alive at all. But, just by a miracle, he saw it. We exchanged letters and snapshots. He'd thought I was probably dead, too. And then, when I won that prize on the radio, it seemed as if everything was set for a real Hollywood ending."

"I can see why that story would get a play in the papers," said the Saint thoughtfully. "And the correspondents of the French news agencies would naturally pick it up and send it back here."

"They did. Charles's last letter said he was quite embarrassed about the publicity he was getting."

"So, after that, anyone with an interest in the Rosepierre family, whether they read advertisements or not, would know a good deal about both of you."

"I suppose so."

Simon shamelessly used a piece of bread to mop up the last delectable traces of the ambrosial sauce.

"Are you reasonably sure that this Charles Rosepierre *was* your brother?"

Valerie stared at him.

"He must have been! . . . I mean, he seemed to remember the same things that I did. And people here knew him by that name, didn't they? And there's quite a resemblance—look!"

She took out her wallet and extracted a photograph which she passed to him. It showed a dark, rather delicate-featured young man with an engaging smile. Simon dispassionately compared it, detail by detail, with the face of the girl opposite him.

"There's a great likeness," he conceded finally. "It's probably true. I was only groping in the dark."

"Here's another thing." She was fumbling in her purse again, and she came out with a small round piece of silver like a coin. "My father gave it to me just before he sent us away. It's one

of those things that stand out in this disjointed kind of childhood memory. He gave both Charles and me one. And Charles mentioned it in his first letter answering my advertisement. He said he still had his, and he wondered if I still had mine."

"That's pretty convincing."

Simon took the piece of silver and looked at it, and a slight frown of puzzlement began to wrinkle his forehead.

"But if he was Jewish," he said, "why a Saint Christopher medal?"

She shrugged.

"Maybe he'd been converted. Or maybe he hoped it would bluff the Gestapo if they caught us."

"Or maybe," said the Saint in a far-away voice, "it was just the handiest thing he had in the shop."

She gazed at him blankly, while he examined the medal more closely and turned it over half hoping to find some inscription on the back. But on the back was only a little quarter-inch indented square, much like a hallmark, except that the indentation was filled only with what looked like a cuneiform pattern of microscopic scratches which conveyed nothing to the keenest naked eye, if they had any significance at all.

And yet, for the first time, the darkness in which he had been groping did not seem so dark. There were vital pieces missing in the jigsaw which he was trying to put together, but at last he was beginning to perceive the outlines into which they would have to fit.

He was very silent while they finished the meal and the wine so that by the time he called for the bill the girl was fidgeting with understandable impatience.

"May I keep this just for a few hours?" he said at last, and dropped the medallion into his pocket without waiting for her permission.

"Have you thought of anything?" she asked.

He stood up.

"A lot of things. I'm not tantalising you just to be mysterious, but they'll take the rest of the afternoon to check on, and I don't want to raise any false excitement until I've got facts to go on."

He walked with her to the Boulevard Raspail, the nearest thoroughfare where they would be likely to find taxis, and only his quiet air of being so absolutely certain of what he was doing somehow forced her to control her exasperation.

"I'm telling the driver to take you to the Place Vendome," he said as he opened the door of the first cab. "You'll find dozens of fascinating shops in all directions from there, which will keep you amused until your feet hurt. At five o'clock, wherever you

are, grab another taxi and tell him to take you to a restaurant called Carrere, in the Rue Pierre Charron. Will you repeat that?" She did so. "I'll meet you there at the bar. Until then you must not on any account go back to the George Cinq."

"But why not?"

"Because as long as you're just wandering around the town, the killer isn't likely to bump into you. At the hotel he knows where to find you. And I like your head where it is. I don't want it cut off."

Her eyes grew big and round.

"You don't think it could happen to me?"

"I'll answer that when I know why it happened to your brother. Meanwhile, don't take any chances."

"But, remember, I promised to meet that Mr. Olivant at five-thirty."

"I want to be around when you do it. That's what I'm talking about."

Her breath broke in a gasp of incredulity.

"You mean you suspect *him*?"

"Darling," said the Saint, "this isn't one of those story-book mysteries, with half a dozen convenient suspects. I've known ever since friend Olivant showed up that he had to be a good bet. The only problem still is to find the motive and prove it on him."

He closed the door gently after her and turned towards the next cab.

On a narrow street near the Odeon he found, unchanged as if the German occupation had only ended yesterday, a little stationery and book-shop which in those days would have earned a spot promotion for any Gestapo officer who had uncovered its secrets. Simon Templar went in and stood browsing over the titles on the shelves, while the jangling of the vociferous little bell hung on the door he had opened died away into silence. He heard a shuffle of footsteps at the back of the shop, and a voice that he recognised said courteously:

"*Bon jour, m'sieu.*"

Without turning, the Saint said in French: "Do you have, by chance, a copy of the poems of Francois Villon?"

There was an instant's pause, and the dry voice said mechanically: "I regret, but today there is so little demand for those old books."

" 'But where are the snows of yesteryear?' " Simon quoted sorrowfully.

Suddenly his elbow was seized in a wiry grip, and he was spun around to face the proprietor's sparkling eyes.

"*Mon cher Saint!*"

"*Mon cher Antoine!*"

They fell into an embrace.

"It is so many years, my dear

friend, since I have heard that password!"

"But you remembered?"

"Who of us will ever forget?"

They held each other off at arm's length, and the years fell away between them. And as Simon laughed in the face of Antoine Louvois it was heart-warming for him to remember that this frail-looking grey man had been the redoubtable Colonel Eglantine of the *maquis,* whose exploits had perforated the intestinal tracts of Himmler's minions with even more ulcers than bullets; and he thought again that only a French hero would have had the sense of humour to hide his identity behind the name of a delicate flower. Those days, when the Saint's commission from Washington had been as tenuously legal as anything in his career, seemed very far away now; but it was good to still have such a friend.

"What brings you back, *mon cher ami*?" Louvois asked. "We shall have much to talk about."

"Another time, Antoine. This afternoon I am in a hurry."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"That is why I came."

Louvois relaxed into instant attention. As if not a day had passed, with a sobering of expression to subtle to define, he was again the sharp-witted, cold-blooded, efficient duellist of the last war's most dangerous game.

"*Je suis toujours a ta disposition, mon vieux.*"

"Was there in the Resistance a man named Georges Olivant?"

"What is he like?"

Simon described him.

"There were so many," Louvois said, "and under so many names. I do not recall him myself. I can make inquiries."

"On the other hand, he may just as well have been a traitor."

"There were many of them also, and many of them also have thought it wise to change their names. But that might be a little easier to trace."

Simon put down the envelope which he still carried, into which he had put the guide-book with the conveniently shiny cover which Olivant had handled.

"On this cover of this book," he said, "are the fingerprints of this man. But cut off the top left-hand corner, which has my own prints."

"That will make it very easy if his prints are on record."

"You still have friends at the Prefecture?"

"Naturally."

"I do not want this to become known to Inspector Quercy, of the *Police Judiciaire.*"

"He is a good man."

"There is a personal reason."

"*Entendu.* He will know nothing about it."

"It is urgent."

"I will close the shop and take the book over at once myself. I

wil have a report for you within two hours."

The Saint fingered the medallion in his pocket.

"There is one other thing I can do while you are gone," he said. "Do you have an accommodating friend who is a doctor, who would have a microscope that I can use for a few minutes?"

"I can find one. Let me telephone first."

Louvois retired to the back of the shop and returned in a few minutes with a name and address written on a slip of paper.

"It is all arranged. He is expecting you."

"Thank you, Antoine. I will come back and wait for you. *A tout a l'heure.*"

"A tout a l'heure."

Simon walked to the address, which was only a few blocks away. The doctor, a taciturn man with an old-fashioned spade beard, showed him directly into a small laboratory and left him there, asking no questions except whether the Saint knew how to operate the microscope and whether he required anything else.

The Saint placed the Saint Christopher medal face down on the platform, centered the square indentation on the back under the objective, and aimed the light on it.

As he adjusted the focus the pattern of almost invisible scratches sprang to his eye as legibly as a page of print.

He read the words so painstakingly engraved there, and then he lighted a cigarette and sat back on the stool and knew the answers to many questions while pictures formed for him in the drifting smoke.

He saw old Eli Rosepierre in his workshop, knowing that the Germans were coming, and too proud or too disheartened to run away, it didn't matter what his reason was, but wanting to save his children. And knowing that it was hopeless to trust them with such jewels and gold as he could lay his hands on, even though they would be lost to him anyway, but wanting to give them something that the invaders could not touch, for the future. And knowing that the children were too young to be relied upon to understand or to remember anything he might tell them about the modest wealth that was still secure. And faced with the problem of giving them the key to it in a form which they might understand some day, but which would be least likely for a child to destroy.

Anything on paper, of course, was out of the question. It was too easy to mutilate or deface, or lose; or a finder could read and take advantage of it. A tattoo might have done, but Rosepierre was not a tattooer. He was a jeweller.

And he had found a jeweller's solution.

Simon saw the old man working through the night with aching eyes, carving the most important achievement of his engraver's art. The etching of the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin was a mere abstract diversion by comparison. This was his testament. On a medallion, because it was most indestructible; of silver only, because it would be least likely to attract a thief; of St. Christopher, because it might disarm racial persecutors, and because it might be treasured more carefully—as indeed it had been. . . .

The Saint took out the slip of paper with the doctor's address and copied down the words from the medal on the other side.

Then, more for idle physical distraction than anything, he wrote underneath the English translation.

There was only one weakness in Eli Rosepierre's ingenious idea. Why would his children ever have been likely to discover the minute engravings on the backs of their good-luck medals?

And in the next flash, Simon knew the answer to that one, too. There must have been someone whom Eli Rosepierre trusted, to whom Rosepierre had given an inkling of his scheme, whom Rosepierre had charged to find the children again, if it were ever possible, and tell them what to look for. Olivant.

Simon thanked the doctor, who still asked no questions, and went back to Louvois' little *papeterie*. He paced up and down the street and almost wore himself out before the old guerrilla fighter returned. But the springy gait of the retired *maquisard* gave him his answer even before Louvois spoke.

"We have success, *mon cher*!"

Louvois insisted on unlocking the door and entering the shop before he would say any more.

"The fingerprints are those of one Georges Orival, *mon cher Saint*. He was a collaborationist, and for that he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison."

"He has escaped, or more probably been released," said the Saint. "And he is looking very prosperous, under the name of Georges Olivant."

"No doubt the *sale type* had plenty of blood money hidden away before they caught him."

"He is now preparing to collect a lot more."

Louvois stroked his chin meditatively.

"Perhaps that can be prevented. There are still many of us who do not think that imprisonment was enough."

"*Ne t'en fais pas*," said the Saint. "His goose is practically cooked already. I personally guarantee it. I must go now and take care of him, but as soon as

this is finished we must have our reunion."

To his relief, although he had consciously tried to reassure himself that he had nothing to worry about, Valerie North was waiting at the bar of the *Carrere*, as he had instructed her. He ordered a Martini to keep her company while she finished hers, and paid the cab, but he would not talk even though the bar was deserted at that hour.

"All bartenders in this area speak English," he said, "and I don't want to risk even a chance of future complications. Our caravanserai is just around the corner, but I didn't want you to go there alone."

As soon as they had finished, he steered her down the street to the Avenue George V, and turned her quickly into the George V Apartments, just before the hotel entrance. They rode up to her floor in the elevator of the apartment wing, and he piloted her expertly through the connecting passage to the hotel section.

"Don't ask me how I know these back ways," he said, "I couldn't tell you without incriminating myself. As far as you're concerned, it's good enough to fool anyone who's naturally expecting you to use the hotel lobby."

He found a chambermaid to open the door for them with a pass key. Inside, she fetched up short with an exclamation, so abruptly that he trod on her heels.

The room was a shambles. Her two suit-cases were open, the contents strewn all over the bed, the other furniture, and the floor. But he was not seriously surprised.

"Did you try to unpack in a hurry when you ran up before lunch?" he inquired calmly.

"Of course not! Who would unpack like this? There's been a burglar here!"

She ran aimlessly about, rummaging among her disordered effects.

"Don't get excited," he murmured. "I don't think there's any harm done that a little ironing won't fix. If you'd been here yourself, it might have been very different."

"I haven't got much jewellery," she protested, "but——"

"I expect it's all here," he said. "The one valuable piece was safe all the time."

He held out the St. Christopher medal.

She took it, and stared at him.

"You've got to talk now," she said. "If you don't, I'll go crazy —or do something I may be sorry for."

"I'm ready now," he said. "Turn that medal over."

"Yes."

"You see that little square impression in the back?"

"Yes."

"I put it under a microscope this afternoon. There's fine engraving in it. Here's a copy that you can read."

He gave her the scrap of paper on which he had written down the inscription and its translation. While she looked at it, he cleared a space on the bed, and sat down and lighted a cigarette. He felt very placid now.

She read:

> *I, Eli Rosepierre, bequeath to the bearer, of whom this shall be sufficient identification, one half of the $50,000 which I have on deposit at the Chase National Bank, New York.*
>
> *Eli Rosepierre.*

"You see," he said, "you're moderately rich. Your father was lucky enough to have some assets that the krauts couldn't reach."

Her face was a study.

"Then Charles's medal—"

"Must have been a duplicate of that one, leaving him the other half."

She sank unsteadily into the nearest chair, ignoring the clothes which she crushed underneath her.

Simon laughed, and got up again to give her a cigarette.

After a full minute, she said: "Where is the other medal now?"

"I expect your brother's murderer has it. But he hasn't had time to do anything with it. Besides, he won't be satisfied until he has both of them."

"Why hasn't he done anything until now."

"Because he couldn't. Your father trusted at least part of his secret to a friend whom he trusted, named Georges Orival. But Orival turned collaborationist, and after the war he was tried and imprisoned. He only recently got out, and he hasn't wasted much time. He introduced himself to you as Georges Olivant."

"Olivant!"

"Apart from his obvious phoniness," said the Saint, "I knew I had something when I shook hands with him. He looks like one of the idle rich, but he has corns on his hands like a labourer. He didn't get them from pottering about in his garden. He's been doing several years at hard labour."

The girl's hand shook a little as she drew at the cigarette.

"And he's waiting for me downstairs!"

"I'm sure it would take a lot to keep him away."

"We must tell the police!"

"Not yet. We still haven't got enough evidence for a murder charge against him. And we still want that other medal. So we're going to meet him just as if you didn't expect a thing."

"I couldn't!"

Simon Templar gazed down at her with level blue eyes in which the steel was barely discernible.

"You must, Valerie. And you must go along with anything I say, no matter how absurd it sounds. You said you'd let me help you. I haven't done badly so far, have I? You've got to let me finish the job."

M. Georges Olivant folded the evening paper he had been reading and tucked it into his pocket.

"Eet say 'ere," he said, "ze police 'ave learn nozzing new about ze tragedy of your brozzer. But do not fear. Zay are very pairseestant. Soon, I am sure, zey will 'ave ze clue."

"They know more than they're saying for publication," Simon remarked. "They told me so."

He wanted to draw Olivant's attention to himself, not only to turn it away from Valerie North's pale stilliness.

"So, you 'ave talk wiz zem?"

"And I've got a few leads of my own."

"I 'ave read American stories," Olivant said, "where ze reporter is always a better detective zan ze police. You are per'aps one of zoes?"

"Sometimes I try to be. Anyway, at least the motive for the murder is known."

"Eet is?"

Simon took a leisured taste of his cocktail.

"Miss North's father—and the father of Charles Rosepierre—had a nice piece of change stashed away in a New York bank. He made a will leaving it equally between them. A rather unique kind of will. It was engraved in microscopic letters on the backs of two St. Christopher medals, one of which he gave to each of the children. Miss North's medal has already been deciphered. Here's a copy of the inscription."

He gave Olivant the scrap of paper, and tasted his drink again while the man read it.

The girl's knee touched his, inadvertently, under the crowded table, and he felt it tremble. He tried to quiet her with a comforting pressure of his own.

He had to admit that Olivant was good. The man's face did not change colour, and the dilation of his eyes could be explained on perfectly legitimate grounds.

"Eet is amazing! . . . Olivant ejaculated. "Eet must be, as you say unique. . . . So, of course, poor Charles was killed to steal 'is copy!"

"You'd make a good detective yourself."

"But eet still does not say, by 'oo!"

"I've got ideas of my own on that score."

Olivant's eyebrows rose in arches towards his well-oiled hair.

"What ees zat?"

"I've been talking to a fellow I met who used to be a big shot in the underground. We've got a hunch that there's some connection with somebody that Rosepierre trusted, who went wrong and went the Nazi way—who may even have betrayed Rosepierre to the Gestapo. But if they tortured him, he must have died before he'd write them a cheque on that New York bank!"

For the first time Simon saw the crawl of fear beneath Olivant's sleek surface. It was no more than an infinitesimal twitch, instantly smothered; but it was all that he needed.

"Eet is too 'orrible to sink about," Olivant said. He turned to the girl. "Your fahzer was such a wonderful man. Everyone love 'im."

"You can't think of anyone who might have turned on him?" she managed to ask.

"I could not think of anyone 'oo would be so bad!"

"My Resistance friend thinks he can," said the Saint. "Anyway, he's making inquiries."

Olivant picked up his glass and drained it, and wiped his mouth.

"I 'ope wiz all my 'eart zat 'e succeed," he said. "But we make Miss North upset again wiz zis talk. I see it. Instead to remind 'er of 'er fahzer and 'er poor brozzer, we should try to make 'er forget a leetle. . . . No, I 'ave ze idea. I 'ave my car. To-night it would be nice to drive out to St. Cloud, to my 'ouse, where we 'ave a nice diner, and per'aps 'elp ourselves to feel better."

Valerie looked at the Saint desperately, but Olivant might have been anticipating the glance.

"Of course," he said, "if Mr. Tombs is not engage, I am most 'appy if 'e come also."

It was precisely what the Saint would have predicted, and the sheer cosmic inevitability of it gave him the same feeling of olympian omnipotence that a master dramatist must experience as he sees the last loose ends of his play falling into place with flawless accuracy in the third act.

"I think that's a swell idea," he said.

He was afraid even then that Valerie would rebel, but terror seemed to have built up in her until she was gripped in a kind of trance that left her without volition.

They drove with Olivant at the wheel of a glistening new car, all three of them pressed together in the front seat, so that Simon could feel the rigidity of her body against him shaken by an occasional shiver, and knew that Olivant must have felt it, too, though the man chattered incessantly about nothing and Simon did his best to help keep

the empty conversational ball rolling.

Once, while they were still passing through the Bois de Boulogne, Olivant broke off in the middle of a sentence and said: "Are you nervous, Miss North? Believe me, I drive most careful."

"I guess I'm just over-tired," she said. "Or else I'm catching a chill."

"I know, you 'ave 'ad a shocking day."

She turned to the Saint, leaning closer to him.

"Where are we?"

He hadn't wanted to refer to it, but he had to.

"The Bois de Boulogne," she repeated after him. "Where Charles was——"

"Please," Olivant said quickly. "For a leetle while, try not to sink of un'appy sings."

"Now that it's come up," said the Saint, in a very even tone that tried unobtrusively to transmit some of his strength to her, "I must ask you one more question. About those medals, Valerie, that your father gave you and your brother. He didn't just give them to you to put in your pockets, did he? How were you supposed to wear them?"

"They were on silver chains," she said expressionlessly. "He must have riveted them, or welded them, or something. At least, I know that mine had no catch that you could undo, and it was too small to come off over my head. I wore it day and night for years. Finally when I got older I had to have the chain cut, because I had other necklaces I wanted to wear, and I couldn't wear that one all the time."

Simon drew a deep breath.

"That's the last answer,," he said softly. "That explains everything. Of course, he had to take the least possible risk of your losing them. And because your brother didn't have to be bothered about other necklaces, he never had his chain cut. He was still wearing it when he was killed. And all the murderer had was a knife. People don't normally carry wire-cutters, or a hacksaw, or a file, when they set out to commit a straightforward murder. It hadn't occurred to him that the chain wouldn't unfasten. And it was too strong for him to break with his hands, and too small to take off over the head. So the only way he could take it, on the spot, was to——"

"*No!*" the girl cried out shudderingly, and buried her face in her hands.

The car seemed to swerve a trifle.

"I am ashame for you," Olivant said harshly. " 'Ow you can 'urt Miss North like zis?"

"I'm sorry," said the Saint.

But he wasn't, for the answer to that question, the mystery of why Charles Rosepierre's head had been hacked off after he

was dead, had to be known. And he knew now, and there were no more questions. With certainty there came a lowering kind of peace.

Olivant's house was not large, but it stood well back in what appeared to be moderately spacious grounds, which looked overgrown and unkempt, about halfway up the hill from the river. The interior was sombre and smelled damp, as if it had lacked the warmth of human occupancy for a long time. Simon was sure that it had.

Olivant ushered them into the heavily furnished drawing-room and turned, rubbing his hands. He seemed to have recovered his overpowering confidence, and his smile was fat and expansive.

"Now," he said, "we are going to be 'appy. What will you 'ave? A cocktail? Sherry? I make you a drink, and zen I make dinner. I 'ave no servant tonight, but I am very good chef."

"Living alone and liking it, eh?" said the Saint mildly.

"Yes. To-night eet is just ourselves."

Simon put out his cigarette. He could enjoy the full flavour of a situation as well as anyone, but he knew that there were occasions when to prolong the enjoyment for epicurean reasons alone could complicate it with unnecessary and unjustifiable risks.

He put a hand into his pocket as if reaching for another pack of cigarettes, but it came out with a stubby blue-black automatic.

"In that case, we won't put you to a lot of trouble, Monsieur Orival," he said pleasantly. "Besides which we prefer not to be drugged or poisoned, whichever you had in mind. All we want is Charles Rosepierre's medallion."

"Are you crazy, Templar?"

The Saint smiled.

"I see you know my real name," he murmured. "I thought you would. You only had to ask a few questions at the hotel. It was a little harder for me to get yours, but your finger prints on that guide-book were a big help."

The man's face had turned red at first, but now the blood was draining out of it, leaving it grey.

"My name ees Olivant. Zis is an outrage!"

"It's going to be a worse one," said the Saint cheerfully, "if we don't get that medal. I'm sure it's either in your pocket or in this house somewhere. Now will you hand it over, or shall I shoot you in the stomach and look for it myself?"

Orival licked his lips.

"Eet is in my safe," he said at last. "Be'ind zat picture."

"Go and get it."

Orival dragged his steps to the painting and lifted it off the wall. Behind it was a small steel door.

He manipulated the dial, and the door opened. He reached in.

He should not have been so conventional as to turn around with a gun in his hand. Simon was expecting it, and ducked. Orival's one shot went wild, but the Saint's did not.

Then the french windows burst open, and Inspector Quercy walked in.

"*Enfin,*" Quercy said stolidly, when the facts that he did not know had been told him, "Miss North has both the medals, and she should be able to claim the inheritance without too much difficulty. And we have this *canaille,* but not in the condition that the State would have preferred." He prodded the body of Orival, alias Olivant, with his foot, and signed to the two uniformed men who had followed him in. "Remove it."

"The State ought to thank me," said the Saint, "for saving you the expense of a trial and execution."

"It is lucky for you," Quercy said, "that I saw what happened and know that you fired in self-defence. We have, of course, been following Miss North all day, to see if the murderer might approach her. You see, we are not quite so stupid and useless as you would like to make us."

Valerie North said: "I hope you won't hold it against him. He's done so much for me. I'm afraid he'd never let me pay him, but at least I don't want him to get in trouble."

"He has an irresistible advocate in you, *mademoiselle,*" Quercy said gallantly.

Simon glanced surreptitiously at the open safe, and then at the windows through which the two *agents* had just disappeared with their unlamented burden.

"By the way," he said, "just to complete the record, I think Orival still had the murder knife in his pocket."

"Yes, we shall need that for the police museum."

Quercy hurried out after his men. He was back in a few minutes, shaking his head.

"For once you were mistaken, *Monsieur le Saint.* It is not on him."

Simon shrugged.

"Well, I guess he got rid of it."

"It is not very important."

Simon Templar agreed. What was important, to him, was that in those few minutes he had been able to transfer the negotiable contents of the late Georges Orival's safe to his own pockets. He caught the girl's eye, but she said nothing, and he knew that her sense of humour was coming back.

instructions for murder

by Lawrence Treat

In the morning, Bessie Warwick sat near the curtained windows of the big study and took Justin Hamilton's dictation. She was slim and attractive, with a clear cast of intelligence brightening her face. But it was overlaid with a veneer of cold, aloof self-control, through which the hate hardly showed.

She waited while he picked up the last letter in the pile and scanned it with obvious pleasure. He loved best the young, the helpless and the innocent, for on them he could vent his spleen without fear of retaliation. As he had on her.

"Dear Madame," he said, smacking his full, round lips. "In reply to your request for permission to use one of my plays without fee, for a charity benefit, I wish to inform you that the only charity, worthy of such a favor is for the benefit of, Yours truly, Justin Hamilton."

Her pencil danced across the pad and set down the sharp, caustic words. Then she glanced up, and her green, slitty eyes watched him surface from behind his desk. He groaned with the effort, but his face remained

You do not casually decide to kill, however much you may hate, unless you belong to those few for whom murder is almost a way of life. Lawrence Treat, author of the thoroughly delightful VENUS UNARMED, reviewed in SMM last year, describes the planning – and the act – and what then happens.

expressionless. Its fatty envelope had no room for lines or ruts, his jowls were smooth and seamless as the expanse of his bald, egg-like dome.

"I'm taking the noon train to the city," he remarked. "You'll get that batch of letters in the mail tomorrow?"

"They're almost ready," she said. Three hundred of them under various names, addressed to the network and praising Justin Hamilton for his brilliant performance on tonight's TV panel.

"You'll be watching?" he asked.

She nodded. "Naturally. I always do."

"Good," he said. "Enjoy me." And he waddled out serenely.

She leaned back and waited for the front door to close. Fifteen years ago, she reflected, she'd been young and bubbling and eager, newly married, and stage-struck by the glamor of a job with the great Justin Hamilton. And he, realizing it, had ground her down slowly and with great enjoyment.

She could accuse him of no single act, for he was a master of constant harassment and a genius at timing it. The telegrams that brought her back from vacations always announced actual emergencies, and her most cherished plans were invariably ruined by solid-gold crises. His demands were both real and plausible, but the accumulation was crushing, and so her marriage had eventually broken up. Since then, J. H. had methodically destroyed her best impulses and involved her in an enslavement from which she felt there was only one possible escape.

The blame, then, was partly hers for accepting her role, and she had no tangible reasons for her hate. But she hated him for what he was, a huge mass of malevolent wit, with a talent dedicated to the somber amusement of audiences he despised. His plays dealt exclusively with murder, and in his imagination he extinguished the entire human race, life by life.

He loved to expound on the art of murder. She would listen attentively, while her long, slender fingers gripped her pad, and she treasured every word that the great man uttered. For he had the knowledge of an expert.

Patience, he advised. And she was patient. Employ a weapon that can't be traced to you, he said. And she found one. Rely on an alibi consistent with your regular routine, he stated, and she prepared one.

Occasionally she took notes, which she memorized and threw away later. "Murder," he would intone, "is the most virtuous of crimes, and the ideal murder, like a problem in calculus, is divorced from all emotion, and

therefore from guilt."

She nodded piously, determined to school herself in dispassion.

"A successful homicide," he continued, rounding his lips to emphasize the purity of his vowel sounds, "requires a logical suspect, a kind of scapegoat for the police. Otherwise the case remains open."

So she sought the logical suspect. But he eluded her, and she began to fear that her requirements were too exacting. Then she perceived that she had nothing to say about them. Her justification for the crime rested on following the rules that the great man formulated. She was merely the humble instrument of his intellect, obeying his precepts and effectuating his will.

Therefore she waited, like a religious fanatic convinced of an imminent second-coming, until that afternoon when the great man went to the city. She was alone in the study, but his presence lingered in the memorabilia of his ego—the photographs, the playbills, the carefully selected publicity items that bolstered the legend of his fame.

She was part of it, she supposed, as she was part of his life. Doubtless most people assumed she was his mistress, and on one unforgettable occasion she had tried to be. He had rejected her with a cold, biting insult, which still rankled. As a result his hold over her was deeper, subtler, and infinitely more degrading.

She slid a letter from the machine and placed it on his desk, for signature. Then the doorbell rang and she turned towards the front of the house. After a moment she crossed the room, went to the foyer and opened the front door.

She saw a tall, friendly young man in a gray windbreaker. The manila envelope tucked under his arm was worn and dog-eared, and it constituted a clear pronouncement as to why he had come. She felt an instantaneous rapport with him, and she trembled with excitement. Her eyes narrowed, and her lips parted in a soft, inviting smile.

"I guess you're Miss Warwick," he said awkwardly.

She nodded and stepped aside. "Yes. Is there something I can do?"

He walked past her and stopped in the center of the foyer. He pivoted slowly, obviously impressed by the massive, carved furniture, the pair of renaissance pictures and the old, faded wall-tapestry. He seemed to have forgotten why he was there, until she closed the door and cut off the bright rectangle of sunlight.

"Oh," he said, squeezing the manila envelope tighter under his arm. "It's about Mr. Hamilton. He produces, and so he

reads plays, doesn't he?"

"Naturally. But manuscripts are sent to the city and weeded out by the office staff. He reads very few personally."

"Oh, I see," the young man remarked, with embarrassment. "Look, my name's Stover and I probably have a nerve barging in like this. I guess part of your job is getting rid of people like me."

"Because you have a play?" she asked.

He nodded. "I've had it around for years, been working on it in my spare time. It's tough, trying to write that way."

"Everybody has to begin," she said gently.

"Don't I know it!" he said. "Here I am, wanting to see him, and nervous as a kid." He shifted his feet and glanced longingly at the door.

"You needn't worry," she said. "He's gone for the day."

"Tell me, would you look at something that wasn't even typed?"

"It depends on how legible the script it."

"Mine's pretty hard to make out," he said disparagingly. "Full of changes and words crossed out."

"Your play means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

"Just about everything," he answered. "All the nights I've stayed up, working, while my wife worries about my not getting enough sleep." He smiled boyishly. "But she's with me, all the way."

The weak, the helpless, the innocent, Bessie thought. The army of would-be writers whom the great man loved to pulverize, without mercy.

"Why don't you come inside for a few minutes?" she said. "You can tell me about the play."

He brightened up. "I'd like to see where he writes," he said. "Tell me, does he work regularly every day? Or just when he's inspired.

She smiled. "You really are naive," she said, and led the way to the great man's study.

Stover entered with awe and gaped at the lavish, expensive furnishings. His eyes swept the bookshelves, noted the pair of typewriters, and came to rest on the mahogany desk piled with papers. As if he were approaching an altar, he walked to the desk and gazed at it reverently. With a start, he noticed the revolver, left with apparent carelessness on top of some letters.

"Does he leave guns lying around?" Stover asked.

"Somebody gave him that, for a souvenir, and he says he keeps it in front of him as a reminder of the proper punishment for a bad playwright." Stover gave her a disturbed frown, and she added quickly. "He also uses it for a paperweight."

"Oh." Stover put his envelope

on the desk and picked up the revolver. "I hope he has a license for it."

"It isn't even loaded," she remarked.

"But it could be," Stover said, and put the gun down.

As he stepped towards the window, she saw that he was older than she had first supposed. There were tension lines around his mouth, and his eyes, quiet and friendly, were long past the days of wondering. So much the better, she decided, and she experienced a strange, pervading ecstasy, as if she had cast a spell over him and he was bound to follow her wishes.

She began talking about dramatic technique and the theatre, while he listened with deep earnestness and asked an occasional question. At her bidding, he examined the great man's bookshelves and handled a ceramic bust of Poe, awarded for a prize-winning play of a few years ago. In the course of a half hour, Stover touched an assortment of objects and deposited clear, tangible prints.

"I'll ask Mr. Hamilton to read your play," she said, standing up. "Could you come here Wednesday? He'll be home in the evening, at eight-thirty, but please be prompt."

"Thanks. I don't know why you're helping me out like this, when I'm a complete stranger. But I certainly appreciate it."

"Don't thank me, yet," she said. "He's merciless in his criticism, I've seen young playwrights leave here in hysterics."

"I don't indulge," Stover said drily.

She gave him a look of appraisal. "No, I don't think you do. You'd be more likely to do something violent."

"I guess you're right about that," he said. His grin made him look boyish again. "But I'll try to control myself, even if I know he shoots bad playwrights. And don't worry, I'll be here on the dot."

As soon as he had gone, Bessie picked up the gun and loaded it. She was still unsure of how and when she would use it, but she had sublime faith in the great man. Somehow, he would guide her.

Humming to herself, she opened the manila envelope.

Shortly after lunch the following Wednesday, Justin Hamilton mentioned the manuscript to his secretary. "This Stover," he said. "What's he like?"

"He's young and rather nice." She noticed the new folder lying on the blotter in the center of the desk. "Quiet, unassuming. He hated to part with his script. Why?"

"I lost it."

"No! It wasn't even typed, he has no other copy."

"Then he's lucky. He can forget it ever existed, and he can go about his normal pursuits, whatever they are." With a shrug, he dismissed Stover from his mind.

Bessie bit her lips and watched the great man open the folder. "I got an idea last night," he said. "I jotted down some notes, and I'd like to develop them."

She opened her pad and waited, with her pencil poised. When he took off his glasses and fingered them nervously, she knew she was about to witness the birth of another smashing success. For the signs were familiar, and unmistakeable.

Momentarily she felt a pang of regret that the play would never be completed, for it would have been good. She sensed it from his concentration, from the way his hands began to fiddle. Presently he'd put his glasses on again, pick up the revolver. He'd hold it by the barrel, fondle it, rub his thumb along the stock. As he warmed up to his work, he'd put the gun away. But until then she'd be nervous, for she remembered the time he'd absent-mindedly squeezed the trigger.

He c l e a r e d his throat. "Ready?" he said. And he began dictating.

With his first words she gave a start, and her eyes shot forth a kind of St. Elmo's fire. The great man was stealing Harold Stover's play, and she felt a stab of excitement. It died down gradually and a sense of peace crept over her, as if God had finally come over to her side.

By late afternoon the outline of the plot was on her pad, with Stover's basic ideas unchanged, but tightened up and strengthened by the hand of an experienced playwright.

At home, where she lived with her sister, Bessie went straight to her room. She remained there until almost seven, when she entered the kitchen. Her sister was preparing dinner. Bessie stood shakily in the doorway and pressed her hand against her forehead.

"Myra," she said. "I don't think I'll have dinner tonight. I seem to have a headache coming on."

"Again?" Myra said, in a voice filled with sympathy. "You do look all in. That man is a slave-driver."

"Oh, no! He gets lost in his work, but you know how wonderful he is to me. Generous, and treating me like a friend."

"You always defend him, no matter what he does."

Bessie gave her sister a worried look. "Not always. He deliberately plagiarized today, and the man he's doing it to has an appointment with him tonight. I think it's no better than stealing.

"He may change his mind,

Bessie. Why don't you go to bed and try to forget about it? For a while, at least."

"If I can."

"Of course you can. I'll see that you're not disturbed, and when you wake up you may feel like eating something."

Bessie nodded gratefully. "You're so good to me," she said in a faint voice. She returned to her room and locked the door.

She undressed without turning on the light. Then she put on black slacks and a black sweater-blouse, and slipped a dark, shapeless jacket over the outfit. With a floppy hat concealing her hair, she looked more like a man than a woman.

At eight o'clock she climbed out of her window, crept along the wall and dashed across the garden. Taking back yards and empty lots, she reached the great man's house in about ten minutes. She closed the door without a sound and stood in the foyer, waiting.

Occasionally she glanced through the narrow peep-hole and watched the street. She had no fear of the great man's hearing her, for his study was soundproofed, to cut out street noises. She supposed he was working on Stover's play this evening, making notes and lifting entire scenes, which he'd dictate tomorrow and pretend were his own.

At eight-thirty she saw Stover march down the street, turn up the path and head for the entrance to the house. She opened the door before he could ring the bell.

"Mr. Stover," she said in a low voice.

He halted a couple of feet from her. "Anything the matter?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes. Come in, I have something to tell you."

He stepped inside and she closed the door. The light, filtering through the parchment shade of a single lamp, was dim, yellowish. It cast shadows that had no outlines, and Stover's face was a stiff mask, vaguely apprehensive under the crease of his forehead.

"You can't see him tonight," she said. "He'd rage and rant, and something dreadful would happen."

"Why?"

"He expects to produce your play, but he'll deny you ever had anything to do with it and he'll claim you never even left a manuscript here. It will be destroyed."

Stover stiffened, and a dark, swollen vein ridged up on his forehead. "He can't do that I'll ——"

"No, no." She grabbed his arm and held him back. "Don't do anything now. He'd tear the manuscript into shreds or he'd burn it up, and then you'd do something to him."

"And why shouldn't I?" he demanded angrily.

"Because it's so unnecessary," she said, in a tense whisper. "I understand him, he trusts me, I can make him see reason. He hasn't written a play in years, he's been dry, creating nothing. But he knows I'm fond of him, he'll listen to me. And the first thing I'm going to do is save the manuscript."

"I can save my own manuscript," Stover said, with determination. "Nobody's going to take that."

"Of course not, and I'm going to make him give up this whole idea, for his sake as well as yours. Don't you realize that I'm trying to protect him? And that you'll benefit if I succeed?"

Stover stepped back. His eyes were dark and murky, but the vein no longer bulged on his forehead. "Maybe you're right," he said quietly. "I'll think it over."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "I'll handle everything, but don't tell anyone what happened. And please go now. I'm so upset."

"*You're* upset!" he remarked sardonically. But he left, without further objections.

As soon as he had gone, she entered the study. The great man, working on a manuscript, glanced up in distaste.

"You look like Dracula," he said irritably. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to tell you how much I liked the beginning of the new play. It has exciting possibilities."

"Naturally," he said smugly. "But it isn't yours."

"Oh!" He accepted the accusation casually, unmoved by any impulse to defend himself. "Apparently you read the script."

"Yes. Is that what you're working on?" She approached the desk and looked at the pages spread out on its surface.

"Plagiarism by Justin Hamilton," the great man remarked, "is a rare compliment. As I intend to point out to him, if necessary."

"I've already told him," she said. "He just left."

The great man dipped forward, and his owlish eyes widened in surprise. "What was he doing here?"

"He had an appointment with you."

"Really?" He picked up the black engagement book and opened it. "I fail to see a record of it."

"I must have forgotten," she said. She reached for the book and wrote in a firm hand. "Stover, 8:30 p.m."

The great man watched her push the book aside and pick up the gun. "Bessie," he said irritably. "Put that thing down. It makes me nervous."

"As you've often told me," she said, with a sharp intake of

breath, "a revolver doesn't take fingerprints. And just think—if I'd let him come in and he'd have accused you of stealing his play. He'd get angry, he'd grab for his manuscript—like this." Her hand swooped out and clawed at a couple of sheets of copy. She laughed as she crumpled them up.

"What are you doing?" he asked in a thin, tight voice.

"I'm showing you what people will think happened. They'll find his fingerprints on the bust, they'll suppose he picked it up. They won't know anything about the rare compliment you expected to pay him. All they'll realize is, that he killed you." She stepped back nervously. "In fact, he threatened to."

The great man scowled. "You'd be the first one they'd suspect."

"I had one of my headaches tonight, my sister thinks I'm home in bed right now. You can call her and ask, but she won't disturb me, under any circumstances."

"I find the discussion boring and your costume singularly unattractive."

"I wear it every couple of weeks, when I pretend I have a headache and then sneak out."

The great man snorted. "A few people have suggested to me that you're in danger of a nervous breakdown. I believe they're right, and I'll take appropriate steps to have you restrained." He smiled benignly. "The idea of threatening me with an empty gun."

"But it's loaded," she said icily. "Ever since Monday."

"I unloaded it yesterday," he said. "Examine it, and see."

She blinked, and she raised the gun and fired twice. The reports seemed to shake the room, and he jerked back as the bullets struck him. His weight shifted, unbalancing the chair, and he toppled heavily. She stared at the remnants of his brain, which had conceived of that last-second bluff of having removed the bullets.

She dropped the gun. Then, in a frenzy, she began tearing up the manuscript, sweeping objects from the desk and creating the kind of chaos of which Harold Stover would have been capable. When she was finished, she surveyed her handiwork critically. It satisfied her, and she left quietly.

At nine o'clock she unlocked the door of her bedroom and stepped out. She was wearing a blue kimono, and she yawned.

"Feeling better?" Myra asked.

Bessie nodded. "A nap always helps. Could I have some tea and toast?"

"Of course, Bessie. Sit down and I'll get some."

"I think I'll step out first, for a breath of air."

She walked to the corner. She took a bundle with her, containing the slashed remains of her black slacks and her jersey blouse. She dropped the package in a neighbor's garbage pail, and she was home in considerably less than five minutes.

She slept well, woke at her usual hour and was having breakfast when a cop rang the doorbell and announced the news of Justin Hamilton's death.

Bessie reacted in shock. "How horrible!" she exclaimed. She bit her lips and pressed her handkerchief to her lips.

"The sergeant wants you to come over there," the cop said.

"Yes. But please—give me a few minutes—to get hold of myself."

The cop frowned, as if he, too, felt the pain. "I know it's tough," he said. "I'll wait here, while you get ready."

She stood up, reeled slightly and then swung on her heel and walked stiffly into her room. There, she sat down on her bed. She had an impulse to laugh. Who in the world would believe Stover's incredible story? Going to the great man's house, learning about the plagiarism, and then leaving meekly? And describing her as wearing black slacks and blouse.

She wouldn't mention Stover at first. She'd let the police locate him. They'd find his name on the engagement pad. He'd admit the appointment, admit his visit to the house. The plagiarism evidence waited in her stenographer's notebook, and she seemed to see the headlines in the evening paper. "Young playwright, deranged by theft of his work, shoots dramatist. Faithful secretary is dumbfounded."

She was safe.

She rose, smoothed her hair and stepped out of her room. "Myra," she said, "I don't know how long I'll be, there will be so many things to do. The police, and reporters, and I don't know what else. But please don't worry."

Myra kissed her. "I know how you feel, Bessie. Come back as soon as you can. And tell them everything."

"Of course," said Bessie. As she walked out to the police car, she saw a garbage truck clatter slowly down the street, emptying garbage pails. She sighed and climbed into the front seat of the patrol car. The cop got in beside her and slammed the door.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

"We don't know too much, yet, except that somebody got in there last night and shot him. There must have been quite a scrap, too."

"He was starting in on a new play," she said, with a slight shudder. "He was probably concentrating on it, he wouldn't

have heard anyone come in."

"They shot him with his own gun," the cop said.

Bessie gasped. "His own gun? But he didn't have any. Just the paperweight on his desk, a kind of souvenir gun, and it was always empty."

"Not last night," the cop said. "There are still four bullets left."

"But that's impossible!" she exclaimed. "When could anybody have loaded it? And—and—oh, I don't know."

"Lady, let us figure it out. The sergeant just wants to ask you a few questions. You were his secretary, you knew his affairs, maybe you can turn up a lead."

"If I only can" she said fervently. "But I'm so nervous."

"Sure, only don't let it get you."

She stared fixedly at the windshield. "Officer," she said suddenly, "he did have bullets for the gun. I saw them once, a long time ago, but I can't remember where he kept them."

"Try, Lady. Try and remember."

"But why would Mr. Hamilton load it? The only reason I can think of—oh, it's just too awful."

The cop stopped for a traffic light and turned to examine her. "What reason?" he asked.

"If he expected trouble, he could have wanted the gun for self-defense. Only why would he expect trouble?"

"That," said the cop, "is something we're going to find out." The light changed, and he started the car again.

"Who found him?" Bessie asked.

"This houseman, when he came in to clean the study."

"That would be William," she said. "Yesterday was his day off." She sighed hopelessly. "How did they get into the study?"

"Well, the French doors on the side of the room were open."

"They always are," she said. "He locks the front door, but anyone could walk in from the garden. Anybody at all."

"Yeah," said the cop. He turned the last corner and swung the patrol car down the quiet street on which the Hamilton house fronted. A couple of other police cars were parked at the curb, and a few inquisitive neighbors were standing around and trying to pick up information. The reporters hadn't arrived yet, and Bessie was glad that that ordeal, at least, was postponed.

As she entered the foyer, she could hear voices from behind the closed door of the study, but the cop led her into the living room.

"Wait here," he said. "The sergeant'll be right in."

"Of course," she said. She sat down, rehearsing in her mind precisely what she'd say.

The weak part of her case was

the mystery of the loaded gun. But it was a mystery the police had to face regardless of whom they suspected. Quite obviously they'd never solve it. In a way, she hoped it might save Stover from the chair.

But there was slight chance of that. Once the evidence began to accumulate, he was bound to be convicted. For she had planned well; her tutelage under the master, Justin Hamilton, was about to pay off.

She heard a footstep, and she turned and looked up. Automatically she started to smile, then her mouth dropped open and she uttered a gasp. Slowly, with the confidence of a man who had his case all wrapped up, Sergeant Stover crossed the room . .

WHAT'S NEW IN CRIME

Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte tracks down the murderer in Arthur W. Upfield's THE BODY AT MADMAN'S BEND (Doubleday, $3.50), but it must be admitted that he does so without the touches which have made the Bonaparte saga such a fascinating one in the past. An Upfield book cannot be bad however; it is close to an impossibility. But there *is* something lacking—something intangible — in the present novel.

An abridged version of Erle Stanley Gardner's THE CASE OF THE MISCHIEVOUS DOLL (Morrow, $3.50) appeared in that recent issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* which caused such a commotion among those for whom Mr. Stevenson is either the memory of what-might-have-been, or a man whose views on many matters, to put it mildly, are not always understood . . . . This can perhaps also be said about Perry Mason, that indefatigable defender of lost causes — particularly when they are beautiful — and bete noir of the inevitably unhappy Mr. Burger. This Dorrie Ambler story is very much in this tradition.

Daniel Broun's COUNTERWEIGHT (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50) was an unusually interesting novel about mayhem in the theatre. His new novel, THE SUBJECT OF HARRY EGYPT (also HR&W, $3.50) deals with the adventures of a young man-about-town whose interests are, in that order, photography, motorcycling, and a lovely actress. His sudden discovery of a world whose standards and mores are decidely rough is a rather chastening experience for the young hero.

H.S.S.

death before breakfast

by Q. Patrick

LIEUTENANT TIMOTHY TRANT of the New York Homicide Bureau followed the sedate waddle of Minnie, his sister's dachshund, through the mid-winter bleackness of Central Park. It was 7:30 on a Sunday morning, an unhallowed hour. But Minnie, who was temporarily boarding with Trant, believed in Rising and Shining.

As an Arctic wind slashed around Trant, Minnie paused imperturbably to inspect a sheet of newspaper which had floated to rest at their side. She put her front paws on it and examined an advertisement for the Ice Follies at the Center Theater. Hopefully, Trant kept the leash slack. Minnie, however, merely sniffed at the Obituaries and padded ahead.

The park was almost deserted, but, coming up the path toward them, Trant noticed the now-familiar figure of the blind man with the Seeing-Eye dog. Every morning since Minnie had inflicted these sadistic pre-breakfast hikes on him, he had met this pathetic pair. Minnie had on previous mornings carried on

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Q. Patrick (Patrick Quentin) is a writing team of two men who, under both bylines, have given many much pleasure over the years. Homicide Lt. Timothy Trant, one of their most popular characters, here does the near-to-impossible. In a matter of minutes, professional experience, and intuition, identify a murderer.

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a hopeless flirtation with the German Shepherd. However, between Trant's firm grip on her leash and the Seeing-Eye dog's apparent indifference, Minnie's progress had been halted.

Sometimes the blind man and his dog were accompanied by a pretty, Gallic-looking girl and sometimes they were alone. Today they were alone, and as the dog steered his master between a bench and a large clumsily boarded excavation in the path, Trant glanced sympathetically at the blind man. His youngish face with its dark glasses looked harsh and hostile. But suddenly he bent to pat his dog's head and his tenderness touched Trant's heart.

"I wonder," he reflected dubiously, "whether I could ever get that fond of Minnie."

It seemed unlikely, unless Minnie made a drastic change in her pattern of life. She dawdled to peer down into the perilous depths of the excavation hole; she inspected a bench nearby and yawned. Then, as if she hadn't a care in the world, she tugged Trant into a skittish gallop.

When Minnie's business was finally completed more people were about and, as Trant hurried homeward toward the life-preserving prospect of hot coffee, he noticed that an excited group was gathering around the excavation hole.

Congenitally curious, he picked up Minnie and walked to the brink of the excavation. In the bottom of the deep pit, sprawled across pipes and jagged fragments of rock, lay the body of the blind man, and the Seeing-Eye dog, moaning despairingly, crouched at his side.

One of the onlookers, a blond young army sergeant, was trying to lower himself into the pit, but each time he tried the dog leaped upward, snarling with bared fangs.

Trant called: "I'll go down, Sergeant."

The sergeant jostled toward him, his overcoat revealing an Eisenhower jacket impressively hung with foreign and domestic decorations. "Are you a policeman? Listen, I saw it all. I was coming up the path. This guy was sitting on that seat." He pointed to the bench Minnie had inspected earlier. "The dog was off having its run. The guy got up to call his dog. I saw him headed for the pit. I yelled and ran toward him but he didn't hear and went over the edge. The dog rushed up, snarled at me, and jumped down."

"Get a cop," put in Trant.

As the sergeant hurried off, Trant squatted at the edge of the pit with Minnie in his arms. It was improbable that the German Shepherd would co-operate with Minnie but the improbable happened. Lowering demure

lashes, she gazed down at the police dog and yelped coyly. The police dog cocked its head attentively. Trant called to it and it did not growl. With Minnie under one arm, he swung recklessly down into the pit. The police dog did growl then, but Minnie pranced toward it with great coquetry. While she charmed it, Trant examined the blind man. He was dead. The skull was crushed and a jagged lump of rock nearby was thickly spattered with blood.

Feeling a kind of cosmic sadness, Trant slipped the wallet from the dead man's pocket and examined its contents—twelve dollars in cash, two ticket stubs for the Center Theatre, an identification card giving the name of Andrew Stiles, and a battered photo. Trant peered at the photo. It showed Stiles in sergeant's uniform with the same pretty girl whom Trant had noticed in the park. They were standing in front of an ancient broken bridge, with a little chapel at its center.

Suddenly, as Trant fingered these objects, he experienced a thrill of astonished excitement. The idea was fantastic and proof was at the moment practically nonexistent, but instinct screamed that he was right. If he could bluff it out . . .

Above, two policemen and the blond sergeant were standing at the pit's edge, lowering ropes. Trant supervised the lifting of the corpse. He coaxed the police dog into letting itself be pulled up, too. Finally, with a smug Minnie under one arm and the bloodstained rock under the other, he was hauled up himself. A policeman, recognizing Trant, hovered respectfully. "Okay, Lieutenant, we take over now. Guess there's nothing special you want us to do?"

"I'm afraid there is." Trant turned to the army sergeant, intimidated by his own daring. "Arrest this man for murder."

The sergeant's jaw sagged.

"Murder!" gasped a policeman. "But he saw the blind guy fall . . ."

"He didn't." Inexorably committing himself, Trant held up the rock and indicated the evergreen bushes behind the bench. "He was hiding behind those bushes. He wainted until the dog was off on its run, sprang out, hit Andrew Stiles on the head with this rock, and dumped the body and the rock into the excavation."

The sergeant's face was grayish green. "Lieutenant, you're crazy."

"That's what all murderers tell me. But we'll dig up your motive." He pointed to one of the sergeant's decorations. "The *Croix de Guerre*, isn't it? So you fought in France. Stiles did too."

In spite of the cold, beads of

sweat were forming on the sergeant's forehead. Trant produced the photograph from the dead man's wallet. "Look at this snapshot. There's only one broken bridge like that with a chapel in the middle. That's at Avignon. The Pont d'Avignon. And the girl—she's a cute little mademoiselle, isn't she? I've seen her right here in the park with Stiles. He stole her from you, didn't he? The two of you never got on overseas. Then, on top of it all, he snitched your girl and married her. Was that the way it happened?"

The sergeant stood as though stunned. Then, with a look of sheer panic, he spun around and started to run like a madman. As the policemen dashed after him, Trant's exultation welled up. *He's cracked,* he thought. *I've done it.*

In a few moments the policemen had dragged the sergeant back. Trant surveyed the young man's guilt-scared face. "Yes, I can see the whole picture. One of these mornings here in the park, quite by chance, you ran into Stiles and his wife and the Seeing-Eye dog. Suddenly, there he was—the guy you'd sworn to get, the guy who'd stole your girl. And he was blind. What a temptation! All you had to do was to wait in ambush some morning when he came alone with the dog. With the excavation hole, it was a cinch. Blind man, left a few minutes without Seeing-Eye dog, stumbles into pit. A cut-and-dried accident case. And, in due course, what was to stop you showing up out of the blue and courting his widow?"

He shook his head. "Fine, but you shouldn't have stuck around. I see the advantage, of course. With you as a phony eyewitness, there's be no embarrassing investigations. But, unfortunately, you overlooked one rather important point. Blind men trip and fall into excavations in broad daylight—yes. But *only* blind men. Not men who can see." He paused. "And Andrew Stiles could see. Oh, he'd been blind. Probably one of those shock blindnesses. But he'd regained his sight. We can easily check with his doctors and his wife. But there's no real need. We've got proof enough."

From the wallet Trant produced the theater stubs. "Two tickets to the Center Theater, Radio City. Thanks to my dog's interest in reading the newspapers, I happen to know that the Center's current show is an Ice Follies. A man who can't see might go to the movies, to a concert, to a theater. But never in a million years would a blind man, however much he loved his wife, take her to the Ice Follies. It isn't worth anything to someone who can't *see* it."

The sergeant, completely broken, gasped: "But the dog . . .!"

"Oh, the dog." Trant shrugged. "Stiles undoubtedly thought that Seeing-Eye dogs pine away when they feel they're no longer useful to their masters. Stiles loved his dog. For the dog's sake, it wasn't much of a hardship, when he took it walking, to pretend for a while at least that he was still blind."

Minnie was gazing at the Seeing-Eye dog now with entranced adoration.

Her tail was thumping while she squeaked her delight. Slowly the German Shepherd lowered its head and made a dab at her nose with its tongue.

Trant patted his head. "Okay, boy," he said resignedly, "if Mrs. Stiles doesn't want you now, I guess Minnie and I have house room for another boarder."

NEXT MONTH—

FLASHLIGHT ON DEATH
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

THE DANCE
by F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

THE LONG GOLFERS
by BARRY PEROWNE

A QUESTION OF CHARACTER
by VICTOR CANNING

THE SPECIALIST
by JAMES REACH

DEATH AT MIDNIGHT
by RICHARD DEMING

and

THE HOPELESS HEIRESS

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the July 1963 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the case of the pleasant strangers

by Rufus King

MATILDA'S letter was vague. Doctor Colin Starr read it again and thought how clearly it revived a portrait of the Matilda Waycrofft he had known twenty-five years back. She had been Matilda Esterly then, and one of the best-liked girls in Laurel Falls.

This emotion had in no way been marred by the phenomenon that her mind had always given the burst-spring impression of a dropped clock. Its dial was so beautiful and lively that you did not care. There had been moments when Starr and several other bucks of that earlier day had had hopes, but Horace Waycrofft had come along from Pennsylvania with his Mercedes and charming aura of broad acres, and had carted Matilda off.

Phillip (the letter said) was going to be married. Phillip was Matilda's son, and Starr figured he must have just turned twenty. The letter went on to announce that the Southern camp where Phillip was quartered was desperately neat but dire, and Alice Dayberry had been sweet, and

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A third story about Dr. Colin Starr, catalyst for violence, by Rufus King, author of THE STEPS TO MURDER (several of the stories in which first appeared in this magazine), MALICE IN WONDERLAND, DUENNA TO A MURDER, etc., and long considered one of the most distinguished writers in the field.

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the cooking so much better than Mess Sergeant Pulduski's, which was heartily competent but definitely lacking in feminine verve, and dear Colin could imagine what spoon bread and Southern fried chicken could do. Just look at the Windsors.

Matilda supposed they would form an arch or something of sabers, although Phillip's outfit was primarily interested in pontoons; and if Colin didn't object to the animal turbulence of young Army men on leave, would he please come to Marchbanks tomorrow, though the wedding wasn't to be until Saturday—because there was something *queer*.

Matilda grew more coherent on Page 3 and admitted to being desperately worried. The surface was all right, with plenty of wedding-party gayety, heaven knew; but there was an *undercurrent*. She was familiar with dear Colin's cleverness about such things (vague implications about the swifter demises, the more popular poisons, and totally inaccurate ones concerning Starr's celebrated cases), and if only Horace were alive, she would never have bothered him. But Horace was gone now, and Matilda felt helpless and bewildered. Worst of all, she felt frightened. So Winston would meet Starr tomorrow at the 5:12 if the tires held together until then. The one on the left had a blister.

Starr discussed the situation with his secretary, Miss Wadsworth. There was nothing, she said, of sufficient importance to prevent his leaving Laurel Falls and staying at Marchbanks until after the week-end.

So Winston met him the following afternoon at the 5:12.

The blister on the left rear tire held, although it kept Winston in a state of edgy taciturnity during the drive from the station at Sewolters through lush early summer countryside of Pennsylvania to Marchbanks. Starr reflected that Horace Waycrofft must have been even richer than Laurel Falls had thought him to be, for the estate was extensive and the house itself one of those Normandy affairs that have a habit of going Normandy one better. . . .

A butler took Starr's hat and gloves, and then Matilda was coming toward him across a large misty hall, and he thought of her for an instant as still being the young girl he had known. She was very lovely and helpless-looking, with friendly, lively eyes and a figure that had not changed.

"Colin, my dear, Frick will see that you're settled, but I want you immediately for myself. Do you still prefer Scotch?"

"Yes, Matilda."

"With water, Frick, in the library."

She turned and went, very cool and summery in white pique embroidered with citron flowers, toward a distant doorway. Starr went with her, and she said: "The library is the only oasis of privacy left. That nice Youngstead boy claims it's impenetrable. Something like Africa, only Africa isn't. They're still in the pool, because of War Time. . . . Haven't you heavied up a little?"

"A pound or two."

"It becomes you. Shall we leave the door open, Colin?"

"If you wish."

"Then we can be sure—I mean that nobody—this listening—"

"As bad as that, Matilda?"

"I don't know." Suddenly Matilda was trembling; and her fingers, as Starr took her outstretched hand, were like ice.

Starr said: "I'll do whatever I can."

"I know you will. I've needed somebody. It's been torture. I thought of you. Sit here. We can see the door from here."

They sat on a lounge near the fireplace, above which hung a stunning Sargent of Matilda. The room was cool with the late daylight and aloof with shadows. It was very still.

She said: "They're all so *new*."

"Who are, Matilda?"

"Phillip's friends. The ones he brought here with him from camp for the wedding-party. You see, the others are all gone. The old ones."

"Drafted?"

"Drafted—enlisted—like a first thaw, Colin. The ground seems terribly bare."

"You don't like them? These new ones?"

"I don't know. It takes time to know about people. I've never been expert in snap judgments. And there isn't any time. There isn't any time for anything."

"This wedding?"

"Oh, it's more than that. I feel as though I no longer had the right."

"The right to do what, Matilda?"

She shrugged hopelessly and said: "The right to criticize, to say anything about his life. This moment of happiness may *be* Phillip's life. It may be all he'll ever have out of living, this hour with Alice. Surely you must understand that chance—that a bullet—"

"Yes, Matilda. And there's you."

"You see that? You see it may mean everything, that Phillip shall keep—well, liking me? How important *that* is at all costs, and how it ties my hands. She went on swiftly, dreading the thoughts as she phrased them. "If he should be killed—soon—I want the brief span, the few seconds he's been home here, to stand out as one of happiness. Oh, you know, Colin."

"Yes."

Starr thought of how many other mothers throughout the land must be facing moments similar to this one of Matilda's, of how disrupting it was to the normal patterns of life, to live beneath that Damoclean sword.

"I've nothing against Alice beyond not knowing her," Matilda said.

"I don't think that's true."

"Yes, it is, largely. What reservations there are I've tried to place on the normal antagonism of a mother toward a stranger who takes her only child. I'd have been thoroughly happy if it had been Elsa—Elsa Manford. They have the next place on the south, and Elsa and Phillip grew up together. It was sort of taken for granted until all this."

"You never can."

"No. You know how impulsive Phillip is. . . . No, naturally you wouldn't, but he goes overboard about things and people. They're always the finest, best, the most charming—all of the superlatives; and he sort of shrinks up if you criticize. He does find out eventually and forms a solider judgment, but this rush, this headlong marriage, Colin! She's cast a spell. Women can. I really think it."

"And there's no time to break it."

"I don't even dare to try. Phillip would hate me for it. Then before he grew to love me again, it might be too late. I must accept everything he tells me about these people, everything they tell me about themselves. I've just got to sit back and let things happen."

"You suggested in your letter that some things had happened, or at least seemed queer."

Matilda glanced nervously toward the doorway. Such of the entrance hall as could be seen was palely lighted and empty.

"Have you ever felt this way? That people were listening—though you knew that they were not? The feeling of hidden ears? It gives you a chill."

"Listening for what?"

"For what I may think about them. For something I might say to turn Phillip against them. Gauging the complaisance of my credulity."

"There's no one here now. It's perfectly all right to talk."

"I think *she* can—I think Alice is capable of hearing me. Not with her ears, Colin. She's half Irish and half Spanish Creole. She tells me that her people are dead. I've built up from the occasional scraps Alice has given me, a composite picture of her home life, graciously surrounded by colored mammies, Sheffield plate, white columns and everything simply dripping with Spanish moss."

"Haven't you done any checking, Matilda?"

"How could I? Phillip's been

there. He's lyrical. Some of the letters he sent me—well, honestly, Colin. She has that simply fatal charm."

"What are you holding back?"

"I just don't like her. It's the way with certain perfumes, which are incredibly heady and expensive, but you don't care to wear them. They're over-something, like putting mayonnaise on an alligator pear. You'll feel certain I'm rebelling at trifles. And I am."

"Go right ahead."

"It isn't only Phillip. She affects the rest of them too. They cavort for her. In their several ways, of course. She gives men the feeling that they're on show."

"She sounds superb."

"If danger is superb."

"How do you mean that?"

"Colin, I wish I knew. I suppose contemporary women felt the same way about the famous women of their times who shattered empires, who had that *physical* something as well as intellect."

"But surely Alice Dayberry is just a girl?"

"It doesn't matter. The seed is there. The men are just as bad."

"In the sense of danger?"

"Yes. There are three with Phillip—his new friends from the camp. They each like Phillip tremendously. They're obvious about that, and they couldn't be more pleasant or agreeable to me, but I think they detest each other."

"Isn't that a little strong?"

"*Detest?* Perhaps. But it gives the undercurrent."

"You wrote me so."

"I can simplify it, I think." Matilda glanced at a watch. "We've time. They'll still swim for a while. I'll take them one by one. I mentioned Arthur Youngstead."

"The library, and Africa."

"Yes. He's terribly nice and stolid, but he's the possessive type. He wants to own things exclusively. He want to own Phillip. He wants to be Phillip's one friend, and doesn't want the other two to share in it. That isn't so bad. But the other two!"

"This still doesn't sound very desperate, Matilda."

"Wait, Colin. You must understand John Lashden first."

"All right."

"He's the most muscular-looking thing I think I've ever met. Like the Adonis who advertises in a leopard-skin, and fixes you up in five lessons. But John's face is ugly, even though it's good-looking. Does that make sense?"

"Perfect sense."

"It's in his eyes. In his smile. He never does smile really, but he wants you to believe that he does. That villain in the movies always does it just before he starts cutting his victims up. Remember?"

"No but I know what you mean."

"And he bullies. He bullies Gerald Harthe. He does it the same way he smiles. Gerald is strong enough. I suppose—certainly enough so to have been accepted by the Army; but it's a strength of nerve rather than of muscle. I've the feeling that any physical feat he's called upon to do is done simply by sheer force of that nerve and will-power. Of course he's an idealist."

"In what way?"

"His country, his duty, about so many things, Colin. I'm sure he considers himself as a crusader rather than as a plain soldier. . . . Oh, thank you, Frick."

The butler had come in unnoticed by either of them, and not through the doorway which they were facing. Starr glanced at him thoughtfully, while Frick arranged the tray of drinks on a coffee-table in front of the lounge.

He said, after Frick had gone: "You don't seem bothered by the service door, Matilda?"

"No, I'm sure of Frick. I'm sure of all our servants. And I'm certain that anyone listening at the service door would be noticed by one of them." She accepted a highball from Starr and then said: "John Lashden isn't in the Army."

"Some civilian job in camp?"

"Not even that. It has something to do locally with civilian defence. Phillip was a little vague about it, but I think it's a county thing, or covers the whole State. It takes him to camp a great deal, at any rate, and that's how Phillip met him. It's another cause for friction, of course."

"Lashden's not being in service?"

"Yes. Both Arthur Youngstead and Gerald Harthe show by little things they've said that they think John's job a soft one, got by pull. Naturally it's irritating to have to get up in the morning when a prize physical specimen like John Lashden can stay in bed. Those things are all trival, but the drink wasn't. I think he was poisoned."

"Lashden?"

"Yes. He drinks a lot of bourbon. He's the only one who does. He's desperately sub-Mason-Dixon about it, and he knows every *cliche* about a mint julep that's ever been used. He's of the bruised-mint school, and he was poisoned the day I wrote you."

Starr showed surprise. "You're very definite, Matilda."

"See if you don't agree with me. They had been playing badminton, and I was watching from the terrace just to be near Phillip. Their drinks were on a table quite close to me, and all of them were back and forth. I mean, I think John Lashden's drink was poisoned sometime

then. I've never felt so miserably shocked. Colin—so terrified—"

"Lashden was ill?"

"No, it was worse in a way. It left things hanging in air. Cobwebs that you can't reach. They had finished a game, and all of them were with me around the table. John Lashden's glass was half full, and he took a drink and then spat it out. Naturally I felt shocked, and even Phillip's liking for John was shaken enough for him to say something about saving such antics for the game-room. Then John poured the rest of his drink onto the grass. He said it tasted differently from the last swallow he had taken. He said it tasted very bitter. Gerald Harthe said, 'Surely not poison, I hope?' and Arthur Youngstead said flatly: 'No such luck.'"

"Alice? Phillip?"

"Alice was—well, ladylike about it. She makes a point of being awfully Good Girls' School whenever I'm with them. I don't mean she put it on or anything. It's quite natural, and has an abysmally unflattering charm. It identifies my adding years in the very best manner. Phillip was completely incredulous, and just thought it a bad joke on John's part."

"Why are you certain it wasn't Matilda?"

"Because John said it *was* a joke. Only, it was the way he said it, with that movie-man's smile; and he did take the empty glass into the house, and went into the kitchen and asked for some mustard, and then went up to his bathroom and made himself sick. To wash his stomach out, of course. Frick told me. John also washed the glass out so it couldn't be tested. I'm sure of it, Colvin."

"It's unpleasant, and curious—but what earthly motive? It's out of focus. And why imply so broadly that he had been poisoned, and then get rid of the liquid which would have proved it? It doesn't make sense."

"Which is precisely why it scared me. I think John Lashden was serving warning on whoever did it. I think he wanted him to know that he'd better not try anything like that again."

"But everything else you've told me is so superficial, Matilda. Some possessive jealousy, some irritating bullying, a seedling *femme fatale!*"

"Those are the things we see, Colin. Those are the only things we *can* see. What do we know of the past? What do we know of the past of any of these people? Did I tell you that Elsa was there too?"

"Elsa's the neighbor? The one you thought Phillip would marry?"

"Yes. Alice hasn't any family. None that's available, anyway. The last-of-a-long-line sort of

thing. She's spoken of a cousinship or two at astronomical distances. So Phillip suggested that Elsa stay here with us and act as maid of honor. He thought it would be nice for Alice to have a girl of her own age also in the house. He never realized what that meant to Elsa. He's blinded, Colin. Blinded by this infatuation. If he wasn't my own child, I'd swear that his eyes get foggy whenever he's near Alice. Elsa has been wonderful about it."

"What was her reaction that afternoon?"

"It frightened me. Because I think she took it as seriously as I did. Her face was positively livid."

"I think I'd like to talk with her."

"You must. You must talk with all of them. You must *stop whatever is happening here, Colin.*"

The pool was still lambent with warm summer sunlight, though shadows were lengthening from the trees. Poised on the high dive board was a copper-tan figure which needed no leopard-skin or Matilda's comment for Starr to identify it as John Lashden. He poised, sprang, and became a golden arrow cleanly piercing cool blue water. He rose, and with no visible effort swung lightly onto the edge of the pool into the group that had been watching him.

There was time before Matilda and Starr joined them for Starr to hear Lashden say: "How about Mamma's little *Tarzan*, Gerry? Man enough to try it?"

Gerald Harthe's sensitive face and lips grew white.

"I need my neck for more important things than risking it in a stunt," Gerald said.

Lashden's laugh was a blend of arrogant understanding, of derision, of full-bodied physical self-satisfaction, of everything but humor. Harthe stood up carefully, with that tension of muscle when every nerve is quiveringly on edge. Then he saw Matilda and became aware of Starr.

"Hello, Mrs. Waycrofft," he said.

The group stirred, got to its feet, were young and handsome entities sheened with water, and a reunited front of good manners faced by age. Matilda introduced. She suggested that the hour was late, no matter where the sun was. She thought that cocktails were coming soon, and that Mrs. Wiggins planned something in the way of a souffle that mustn't fall unless Matilda's domestic staff were to fall too. Both Alice and Elsa would learn that profound truth when they became cursed with their own household establishments.

Alice Dayberry smiled with reserved enchantment, just enough to be amused, just enough to be polite. She said to

Matilda that she knew only too well what Matilda meant. Alice's own cook, Mammy Lou, was a tyrant about such dishes as had to be served during their brief moment of elevation.

Alice took her time with her greeting of Starr. He felt that she would do this with any man. He emerged from it somewhat atingle and rather aware of himself. She exuded something. She certainly did.

He found Elsa Manford different. Elsa was plain, and very likable, and completely negated by the extraordinary physical beauty of Alice, just as the three other young men were negated by the physique of Lashden. He would have prefered to walk back to the house with Elsa, and try some gentle pumping as to why she had taken the alleged poison-attempt on Lashden seriously enough to grow pale about it, as Matilda had said Elsa had; but he found himself damed (surely that was the opposite of squired) by Alice.

Alice's voice was charming, as with everything else about her, and she held it at that flattering pitch suitable to a conversation-for-two in the presence of others.

How nice, said Alice, that he, an old friend of the family, or rather of Mrs. Waycrofft's, had come on for the wedding! How good of him to give up his important practice, to take this valuable time! She knew how famous he was. Who didn't?

All this in the most soothing of Southern intonations. Starr caught himself feeling aglow. He found her complete candor, which she turned on after twelve steps or so, extraordinary.

"I know just how Mrs. Waycrofft must feel about me," she said softly. "Any mother would, about a man-child like Phillip. She's being awfully sweet and I love her for it. You'll try to like me, Doctor Starr?"

"I do, Miss Dayberry."

"Well, that's mighty sweet of you, too. I just know how Mrs. Waycrofft must value your opinion. I intend for her to come to love me after all this is over, and Phillip and I come home here to live."

"You won't keep your place down South?"

"I don't think I could keep it anyhow, Doctor. Nobody does know rightly how deep it is in mortgages and taxes. I love the old place, dearly love it, but Phillip's home is up North here, and there'd be no sense in our keeping up my family place just for us to visit once in a while. I've told Phillip I'd rather be shut of it, Doctor."

"You will miss it, I'm afraid."

"I'd miss it more by just seeing it occasionally than if it were cut completely out of my life. It

isn't as if Mother or Daddy were still living, as if anyone I loved at all were there. It's just a shell filled with ghosts of happier days. I won't go back to it again —ever."

Starr realized that the words and the sentiments involved in t h e m w e r e commonplace enough; they could have been stereotyped with ease from a thousand mind-tracks. But this girl had the art of wrapping them in a special charm; she coated them with glittering and tragic implications: the fine old mansion, the lush, lush fields, cut crystal and the glowing patina of lovingly waxed woods and (naturally) t h e afterwraiths of loyal happy slaves. And there it was, all of it, sagging beneath taxes and mortgages, with all its graciousness being beaten by the whips of assorted economic *Legrees*.

As for Alice herself, she was the brave young thing incising it off with one stroke of a knife and casting her lot with Phillip's. Which was, Starr reflected as the Norman towers of Marchbanks rose high above the trees, a sound handsome one.

"Don't you think," Alice said, "that I am right, Doctor Starr?"

He allowed himself a platitude.

"When you reach my ripe old age of forty-seven, Miss Dayberry, you'll discover that everyone always is."

As Matilda had said in her letter, Starr found the surface gayety of the young people at dinner in keeping with the nature of the house-party. He was aware, however (because he purposefully watched for it), of the care with which John Lashden ate—care, that is, in confining himself to the general dishes. He was also impressed by the splendid manner in which Matilda floated brightly on this exuberant surface. He was seated at her right, and did his best to follow the flowing variants of her chatter.

She managed brittle vagueries on the current country-club scene, where they were going afterward to dance. It consisted, she said, of delicately galvanized matrons and the plumper middle-aged. Youth had vanished, and certain bucks who had resigned themselves to a retirement on the shelf were enjoying a second buckhood, if that was a word.

When she returned to the subject, Matilda lowered her voice and said: "He doesn't smoke cigarettes, you notice."

Gerald Harthe, the idealistic young crusader, alone of the young men was not doing so.

"Is that something significant?"

"Yes, in a fashion. It confirms how I feel about him. He wants no weakness. That nervous

strength of him wants everything strong. After dinner he will smoke his pipe. None of the others uses one. I don't think he enjoys a pipe, but it's the virile thing to do."

"You're very perceptive."

"I suppose I am."

Dinner ended, and they moved off, after a time, to the country club and danced. Starr noted that John Lashden drank a great deal of bourbon during the evening, probably making up for his distaste at further drinking of it at the house. Lashden paid innumerable visits to the bar, and by midnight Starr thought him drunk.

Lashden's condition also grew increasingly obvious to Matilda and the rest of the party, so toward one o'clock she suggested that with the wedding taking place tomorrow, it might be a good idea for this one night to go to bed early. Starr knew she was worried at an increasing nastiness on Lashden's part toward Harthe. . . . They got into cars. Then drove back to Marchbanks. They went to bed.

The crash came at two o'clock.

It resounded through the large quiet house. It came clearly into everyone's room, where no one, having just got to bed, was as yet asleep.

Starr automatically glanced at his watch after turning on a bed-lamp, and noted the time. It took him scarcely more than a minute to throw on a bathrobe, get into slippers, and run downstairs. The hall was in darkness, but the library door was open and lamps were on inside it.

Starr found Lashden slumped on the lounge where he and Matilda had been sitting that afternoon. Lashden was dead. Before the others joined him, Starr noted several things:

The cushions at the end of the lounge away from Lashden were mussed.

A taboret that had held a large Chinese vase was overturned. The smashing of this vase on a strip of waxed flooring between rugs had caused the crashing sound.

The taboret had stood on a line between the lounge and the service door of the library.

Lying on the floor, closer to the service door, was a heavy crystal ball.

A bottle of bourbon and a glass half full of bourbon were on the coffee-table before the lounge.

Pipe tobacco was obvious in the air, and lying on the coffee-table was a pipe. Starr pressed a fingertip to the open end of the bowl. The rim, and the ash, were hot.

His first thought was: "The damned young fool!"

He studied Lashden's body. Some matting of blood and hair

was indicated on the back of the skull. He glanced at the heavy crystal ball on the floor, and thought it the most obvious weapon. He delicately probed the head wound, testing its nature. There was nothing impressive about it. The bone was not crushed. He found himself returning to the coffee-table and testing again the temperature of the pipebowl. He felt the presence of a paradox, of something wrong.

Then the others came in, and he quieted Matilda as she said to him brokenly: "This is my fault, Colin—mine—"

Starr always thought that Matilda was very clever about it. She held up extraordinarily well until the police came, and then decided to collapse. This was at three in the morning.

He knew that the collapse was the result of her own decision, and appreciated that its purpose centered in her son Phillip. It served to bisect Phillip's protective instincts between his fatuously adored Alice and his well-beloved mother. Had Matilda just gone on, as she had very well been able to, she would have had meager shrift.

Starr was with her and Phillip when she insisted, from the *chaise-lounge* in her own living-room, that the wedding must take place at all costs. She dissected the phrase cost by cost. Naturally, the guests would have to be notified not to come. Frick, she thought, could very well attend to that. The ceremony itself would be reduced to a stark simplicity, one just sufficient to cover our man-made laws and the services of the church. The small reception, the caterer, the florist, all those things would be canceled—"but don't worry, darling boy, the wedding will take place!"

Darling boy (Phillip was, Star thought, a truly splendid young man, even though blindly glutted by his infatuation for the fabulous Alice) decided to have none of it. The more Matilda insisted that he should, the more he insisted her wouldn't. Alice and he could very well wait until this ghastly mess was cleared up.

He wondered whether their leaves would have to be extended; but whatever dispositions of their movements should be made, the wedding would wait. Matilda chose this point to complete her collapse, and Phillip tiptoed out to leave her to the ministrations of Starr.

She sat up after Phillip had closed the door, requested a cigarette, and said: "I feel criminal about this, Colin. I should have insisted right after John Lashden complained about the julep, that there be a thorough airing, even if it did involve an official investigation."

"We went into that, Matilda. We decided yesterday there wasn't an apparently reasonable motive."

"But there was. There must have been. Because it has happened."

Starr observed the slight trembling of her fingers as she held the cigarette to his lighted match. He said: "Have you been frank with me?"

"No, I haven't. I love Elsa almost as much as I do Phillip. I would shelter her against suspicion as strongly as I would shelter him."

"Hadn't you better tell me?"

"Yes. I spoke about Elsa's face turning positively livid that afternoon when John threw away the drink. I did question her. I forced her to answer me, Colin."

"Yes, Matilda?"

"I spoke with her here in this room, and even after I had practically dragged it out of her, it seemed a molehill. She had happened to see John Lashden and Alice late at night in the garden. She saw them from her bedroom window."

"Saw what, Matilda?"

"That's just it. They were just talking. It's difficult to make you understand this; but when Elsa was telling me, I caught some of the—well, the unspoken things which she had felt. *Is* there such a thing as intuition, Colin? Elsa *felt* there was something between those two. Elsa's been desperately unhappy, of course, and the poor child imagined all sorts of things. About Phillip, I mean."

"She thought that Phillip also might have thought things?"

"Yes. It was utterly stupid; but I don't think Elsa's been in her normal, rational mind through all this. And there *was* the poison."

"You must tell me. You must hold nothing back."

"Elsa's father is a doctor. He has a laboratory in the house—a ten-minute walk to the south of us; and everyone was over there for a luncheon Elsa's mother gave—just before that terrible julep business in the afternoon."

"I see."

"You don't and I didn't. I thought I did, until tonight. I thought both ways. I did think that Elsa might have tried to poison John Lashden, or else that she thought that Phillip might have tried to—only, both of those thoughts were too utterly absurd, and now its all right."

"All right?"

"But of course. Gerald Harthe's pipe was on the table, and you yourself told the police that the bowl had been hot when you touched it."

Starr smiled at her strangely.

"Matilda, just how well *do* you know these people?"

"But I have told you. I know what Phillip has told me. I know what they've said about themselves."

"Then you know nothing at all."

"I suppose that is true."

"At no other time than one such as the present could this have happened."

"What do you mean, Colin?"

"I think it's our answer. I am going to find out."

Going downstairs, Starr thought of this state of general ignorance, and of how little he too knew Matilda herself. Twenty-five years ago was a long time. And even then—what, really, had he known of Matilda then?

County Attorney Christopher Luksby joined him at the foot of the stairs. Luksby was a pleasant, quiet man with intelligently alert dark eyes.

"Got some pretty quick action out of the boys down in Chelmsboro, Georgia, Doctor. Don't tell me that Southerners are slow."

"One of our most cherished fictions, Mr. Luksby."

"Seems this Lashden kept a room in the Beauregarde Hotel. His father's kind of a big shot politically, in an intricate sort of way. Naturally, they don't come right out, but you can guess he's the guy who fronts in a silk hat at citizens' indignation meetings in Chelmsboro, and then runs home and pulls strings. This kid of his, John, was almost a prodigy at being a problem, and the old man thought this defense stuff would keep him out of mischief and still save his skin from being punctured by a bullet. The news of his death almost killed the old gentleman.They said his face turned gray."

"Have you reach any decision?"

"Oh, the chief and the boys have it wrapped up in a nutshell. Just a sudden homicidal rage. Harthe, of course."

"And you?"

"The motive is so thin I don't like it. They reason like this: The party got back here from the country club around one, and were in their rooms by a quarter past. They had three-quarters of an hour, before the crash came at two o'clock, to get undressed and into bed. And everybody was in bed, or certainly in their right clothes, at two. But not Harthe."

"So I noticed."

"No. Harthe was all dressed. He was, he says, in a stew. It was a general stew from Lashden's naggings, and a particular stew because he had lost his pipe and so couldn't smoke and get soothed. So he figured, he says, Lashden had swiped his pipe, and after a while he went to Lashden's room to get it back

and have it out with him. But Lashden isn't in his room, so Harthe goes back to his own room and keeps on simmering while he wrestles with himself as to what to do. So he says."

"It sounds perfectly reasonable."

"The boys don't think so. What they say is that Harthe came down here and got his pipe away from Lashden. Harthe could do this, because Lashden was drunk enough to be almost out on his feet. Then he lit the pipe and stood there telling Lashden this and that, getting the past week's load off his chest. Then Lashden tangled with him—to wit, the rumpled cushions on the lounge—and got Harthe into a white-enough rage so that Harthe grabbed up the crystal ball and socked him on the skull. Then Harthe knocked over the taboret in his nervous hysteria to get away from the scene of the crime. The boys have him typed as a nervous hysteric."

"I think he is. It was the first thing that made me feel he was innocent."

"Just a minute, Doctor. What is this?"

"There are several things, Mr. Luksby. The wound itself, the smashed vase, and the badly indented condition of the stem of the pipe."

"I don't follow you, Doctor. I wish you'd explain."

Starr did.

Food in the form of coffee, toast and scrambled eggs was arranged, and the final report from Georgia reached County Attorney Luksby shortly after five. He suggested that Starr be with him during the interview which would take place in the music-room—because, Luksby said, he was not adept at handling mad shrieks.

Alice Dayberry had stood the strain of the long hours very well. She had put on a plain wool dress of hunter's green, and her hair and her make-up were both careful works of art. She managed to give the impression that it was she who was graciously receiving them rather than they who had come to question her. She suggested that they sit down. She selected a *fauteuil* in scarlet brocade for herself, and said: "Naturally, you must interview everybody, Mr. Luksby. I fear there is so little I can tell you."

"We have been in telephone communication with Chelmsboro, Miss Dayberry."

"With John's father? I've never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Lashden, but I grieve to think of what a shock this must have been for him."

"So it was. Miss Dayberry, we now know these things about you: Your property and chattels are due for foreclosure. You are

penniless, and you are heavily in debt."

Alice turned wide deep violet eyes upon Starr.

"But I told *you* those things, Doctor. I told you this afternoon. Everybody knows them."

"I suggest that you listen to Mr. Luksby, Miss Dayberry."

"The police in Chelmsboro have found the agreement," Luksby said.

Her face stiffened, distorting, erasing its beauty completely.

"What agreement?"

"It was found among Lashden's papers in his room at the Beauregarde Hotel. An agreement in which you pledged yourself to pay him a suitable sum, should he *arrange a rich marriage for you through his contacts in camp.*"

The county attorney waited for her to speak, but she seemed stunned, and a curious mottled look came over her skin.

He said: "Lashden's free access to the camp made the survey of prospects simple. I dare say every camp in the country has its outstanding example of some young drafted man of great wealth. Lashden selected Waycrofft, and introduced him to you. The rest was simple. He was alone in strange surroundings, in an advanced emotional state of tension; his normal yardsticks were left behind or broken, and you were a young woman of great beauty and charm. You were aware of Waycrofft's nature. You knew that one word from Lashden, exposing fact that Waycrofft had been your dupe, would kill the marriage either before or after it had taken place. It was a type of blackmail that Lashden could bleed you with all through your married life. So you killed him."

The dam broke. . . .

Luksby said through her shattering screams: "Go to it, Doctor. This is up to you."

Sunrise shot amber shafts into Matilda's living-room and across the table where she sat facing Starr. She poured coffee, and said she would give him her lump of sugar because she remembered he always took two. She lifted silver, and heat rose gently from buttered muffins.

She said: "I do hope they'll just put her away for a little while. She couldn't have been quite sane."

"Unfortunately, there was premeditation, Matilda."

"Will it matter?"

"Juries are less susceptible nowadays. I doubt whether even her remarkable charms will offset the pipe."

"I'm not clever, Colin, and that pleasant Mr. Luksby tells me you've been terribly so. Tell me simply about it. Tell me why you knew so soon it wasn't Gerald Harthe. Mr. Luksby said it was the wound, and then he got tongue-tied."

"It wasn't the sort of blow that a youngster of Harthe's temperament would have struck. He's the nervous, suppressed hysterical type. If he'd been driven into a fury sufficiently to urge him to kill, Lashden's skull would have been crushed in. I think Harthe would have struck again and again until his homicidal rage was spent."

"But the blow *did* kill."

"Because Lashden was drunk. That meant his brain was already under the influence of a depressant. You see, Matilda, in such a state even a slight added injury to the brain could have enhanced the depression, and in such circumstances death could result from a degree of violence which ordinarily wouldn't be dangerous to life. It was—how shall I say it?—a hesitant blow. A woman's blow."

"But, Colin, dear, think of that creature who just kept on using the ax."

"I doubt whether that woman was ever either nervous or hysterical. As for her use of the ax, I think she enjoyed it."

"Colin!"

"In any case, I'm just saying that Lashden's wound seemed a most improbable one for a youngster like Harthe to have inflicted. Then there were the vase and the pipe."

"Mr. Luksby said that Alice was both clever and stupid. He only confused me when he tried to tell me why."

"She was stupid to have believed Lashden when he assured her that he had put their agreement in a place where no one would ever find it. She was clever, or trying to be so, when she took the pipe from Harthe's pocket on the drive home from the country club, and decided to use it to throw suspicion upon him."

"But that was clever, Colin, wasn't it?"

"Look at it this way, Matilda: Suppose Harthe had struck that one deliberate blow, why would he, in a lighted room, run crashing into a perfectly visible taboret and vase, and why head for the service door in the first place? Lashden was dead, and there had been no noise. Why not just go quietly upstairs by the front staircase and go to bed?"

"But Alice did run into the vase."

"No; she lifted it from the taboret and smashed it on a bare strip of flooring where it was certain to make a loud crash. She did this deliberately, because she wanted to rouse the house. She wanted us to come down swiftly while the bowl of Harthe's pipe was still hot."

"I just can't visualize it. Her smoking it, I mean. It's—well, terrifying. Standing there—he was dead, of course? And she

did just stand there and smoke it?"

"Yes. Harthe's nervousness made him clench the pipe stem very hard. The indentations in it are quite deep from his teeth. Alice wiped the stem off to remove any fingerprints before she placed the pipe on the coffee-table, but the lip-rouge that got pressed into the identations matches hers."

"Then they—can prove premeditation."

"Yes,"

"Do you think she poisoned that julep? Do you think she took some poison from Doctor Manford's laboratory during the luncheon party?"

"She is too clever, in that respect, to say. I think not. I think that in that garden talk she had with Lashden, she may have threatened to kill him if he ever exposed their agreement. I think he just put on that poison act to warn her to lay off."

"So it's finished."

"Yes, Matilda."

Matilda looked vague. She absently offered Starr more muffins.

She said: "If only she didn't have quite so much good, fine common sense, and did have one dash of that—what is it the French call it—*gaiete parisienne*?"

"Alice?"

"No, Colin. Elsa."

CRIME (UN)LIMITED . . . . .

Organized crime appears to have finally come to England in a way predicted years ago by some of your favorite authors. As we went to press, Scotland Yard's criminal intelligence section was trying to identify two known organizations that are making their money out of other crooks.

One is a finance corporation that provides bandits with money while they are preparing for the increasingly frequent "wages vehicle robbery". Wage snatchers are called "blaggers" by the police; this still unidentified finance corporation has been nicknamed "Blaggers, Incorporated".

These raids have become so profitable to all concerned that the financiers are said to receive an unusually high interest on their loans — with no protests . . . Preparations for a raid are detailed; the planning will often take months.

Another organization that Scotland Yard would like more information on is the group of forgers who supply certificates of insurance and driving licenses for drivers of stolen cars. A certificate of insurance is said to cost roughly $45., and a driving license $15.; the right contact will put you in touch with the proper people whom police hold responsible for the failure to clear up over two-thirds of the car thefts in London each year. In other words, three thousand cars, trucks, "vehicles", are stolen every year on the streets of London — and stay stolen . . . .

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the days of september

by Julian Symons

Tuesday, 27th September

LIKE MOST of Francis Quarles' cases, this one began with him sitting behind the desk in his Trafalgar Square office, listening to somebody talking. Quarles was a big man, the desk was a big desk, the room was small. The effect was one of overcrowding. Politicians had sat in the chair on the other side of that desk and told Quarles Cabinet secrets; a woman film star had gone on her knees beside the desk to beg that he should find and destroy compromising photographs. The man who sat opposite the desk now was telling Quarles that his baby son, John, had been kidnapped.

He was a small, tough, dark man; his name was Roger Gaye, and he was an insurance broker. He talked to Quarles in a flat, even voice.

The only sign of emotion that he showed was the tight interlocking and separation of his fingers.

"We live in a house at Wimbledon, my wife and I and John,

Julian Symons, the distinguished British mystery writer and critic, is the author of a number of novels including the recent THE PLAIN MAN (Harper, Row, $3.50), and BLAND BEGINNING, THE BROKEN PENNY, THE IMMATERIAL MURDER CASE, etc. This is the first publication of this story in the U.S.

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he's just seven months old; a detached house in Elder Grove, which leads straight off Wimbledon Common. There's a woman who comes in every day, and a girl who lives in and looks after John—"

"How long have they been with you?"

"Mrs. Dunnett for two years, that's as long as we've been in Wimbledon, and Lilian for five months. Nice girl, Lilian, takes John out for a walk every morning in the pram when she goes shopping. She took him out this morning, and left him in the pram at the pram park by McClure's, you know, the big store." Gaye leaned forward and spoke emphatically for the first time. "She was gone three minutes, Mr. Quarles, no more than that, she says, and I believe her. The pram was empty when she came back. John had gone."

Quarles had been making notes. Now he asked, "What about his covers—shawl, blanket, toys? Had they been taken?"

"His blanket was still there, but a toy—a rattle, rather a big one—had been taken."

"What time did this happen?"

"At half past eleven this morning. I was in the office. There was a phone call to my wife at home before midday. A man's voice. He said John was safe, and that we shouldn't tell the police."

"Have you told them?"

"No. Do you think we should have?"

"Of course. Anything I can do, the police can do better."

Gaye said slowly, "My wife—Crystal—is terribly upset. She insisted that we shouldn't tell the police. She thinks they, the kidnappers, will get to know about it, and that they'll kill John. We've been arguing about it ever since I got home."

"And?"

Gaye's eyes stared into Quarles', direct and uncompromising. "She's convinced me. We can't risk John's life."

"You intend to pay the ransom money?"

"If you can't help us—yes."

"I doubt if anybody can help you," Quarles said. "But I can try."

They left the office at a quarter to four.

Elder Grove was a cul-de-sac, and the Gayes' house, The Elders, stood at the end of it. There was a separate driveway that curved round and concealed the long, low, modern, white-painted house from the road. The door opened as Gaye's car drove up, and a woman ran out of the house. She was in her late twenties, thin, dark, nervously pretty. She turned away when she saw Quarles. "You've been a long time."

"You knew where I was going," Gaye said patiently. "To

see Mr. Quarles. He's come back with me."

"Yes. It's just that I thought there might be news. Of John, I mean."

Gaye patted her shoulder and said to Quarles, "Come in."

The house was furnished without taste, but comfortably. Quarles went up into the baby's bedroom and looked at its empty cot. He talked to Lilian Wilson, a fresh-faced girl of twenty-one.

"You see, sir, I did just what I often do. There's this pram park at McClure's and I often leave John there if it's only for a minute or two. This time all I did was go in and buy a shampoo, and when I came back he was gone."

"You didn't notice anybody hanging around the pram park."

"Nobody at all. There's a commissionaire on duty, and he saw nothing."

The telephone rang. It was, Quarles realised, a sound for which they had all subconsciously been waiting. Crystal Gaye shivered, and started towards the hall at a run. Her husband said, "There's an extension up here, if you want to listen in."

Quarles nodded. He picked up the extension and heard a man's voice, blurred and unmemorable.

"Is that Mrs. Gaye?"

"Yes." She spoke in a whisper.

"Your baby is very well. Have you told the police?"

"No."

"Good. You want him back, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Then put your husband on the line."

"This is Roger Gaye." Gaye's voice was sharp and clear.

"Listen, Mr. Gaye. If you want John back, it's going to cost you twenty thousand pounds."

"I can't raise that much money until next week."

"I'm afraid you'll have to, if you want your son back, Mr. Gaye." The voice was still blurred, but now faintly—what was it?—amused. "Thirty days hath September."

"What do you mean?"

"Today's Tuesday. I'll give you until Friday, that's the thirtieth. I want the money then."

"I don't know if I can manage it."

"You'll just have to, won't you?" Now the amusement, the pleasure, was unmistakable. Over the telephone came what might have been a child's contented gurgle. "He's worth it, isn't he?" the voice said. Then the connection was broken.

Quarles went downstairs. Crystal Gaye sat in a chair crying. Her husband stood staring at the telephone as if it was alive.

"I still say you should tell the

police," Quarles told them. "Now."

Gaye turned a furious face towards him. "We want our son back alive, Mr. Quarles, don't you understand? Can the police guarantee that?"

"Nobody can guarantee it. Certainly I can't. If you're going to pay the money, you don't want me." With deliberate brutality he said, "You're fools. But just pay it and hope."

Crystal Gaye stopped crying, and looked up at him imploringly. "We daren't tell the police, but it will ruin Roger if he has to raise the money. Please help us, Mr. Quarles."

Quarles hesitated. "You'll follow my instructions?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll do what I can."

Quarles and Lilian Wilson walked out into Elder Grove. The houses on either side were solidly Victorian, detached, set well back from the road. At the end of Elder grove, where it turned into Frant Street, were two Edwardian houses, red brick and mock Tudor. From Frant Street they walked into the High Street. Lilian Wilson, her first nervousness gone, talked all the time. Yes, the Gayes were very nice people to work for, though it was really Mrs. Gaye, of course, because he was never home before seven in the evening or later. And they were nice people round about, too. She took John out every day on to the Common before going shopping; it was a regular routine.

"And if I know anything about it, you got to know other girls who were pushing prams on the Common?" Quarles suggested.

"That's right. You have to be careful who you talk to, mind. But there's Mrs. Thompson who lives just along Frant Street here—her Rosalind is just twelve months old, and perfectly sweet. And a girl named Alice—I don't know what her other name is—she's nursemaid to the Pykes, who live in Elder Grove. And then there's Mrs. Bennett, but her Billy hasn't been well, and she's kept him indoors lately."

"What about boy friends?"

Lilian Wilson coloured. "I haven't got any."

"I'm not trying to pry into your personal life, Lilian. Do you see what I'm trying to get at? This was a perfectly-timed job. Whoever took John knew your routine very well. It may have been somebody you talked to."

McClure's was a big chain store which sold everything from shaving cream to nylon stockings, from garden shears to lighting fittings. The pram park, labelled as such in big letters, was in a courtyard at one side of the store, with stalls for per-

haps three dozen prams. There was a brick wall at the far end of the courtyard, and a commissionaire strolled up and down between the entrance to the store and the pram park.

"The pram park was pretty full," Lilian Wilson said, "but there were half a dozen spaces. I wheeled John into one of them, gave him his rattle to play with, then went into the store and bought a shampoo. I was served at once, so I don't think I could have been more than three minutes."

Quarles took out his watch. "Let's try it. Repeat exactly what you did then. Buy another shampoo. I'll pay for it."

She nodded, and walked off towards the store. She was back in just over three minutes.

"You found John had gone. What happened then?"

She passed a hand over her forehead. "I blame myself, Mr. Quarles, but I don't know what else I could have done. At first I couldn't believe it— you know, I thought in some way I must have made a mistake about the pram. Then I got frightened and asked Jenkins, that's the commissionaire, but he couldn't help."

The commissionaire, large, blue-uniformed, moustachioed, heavily bemedalled, was eyeing them speculatively. Quarles went up to him. "I believe this young lady spoke to you today."

"That's right . . . something about a missing baby. I hope the little fellow has turned up."

"It's a bit of a puzzle," Quarles said, with intentional vagueness. "You keep an eye on the pram park when you're on duty, I suppose?"

"Certainly do. Sometimes they get left as long as an hour or two at a time, then if there's a spot of bother we put out a message in the store saying 'Will the mother who has left her baby in a blue and cream baby carriage please come out and attend to the little dear', you konw the kind of thing."

"Did you put out any such message this morning?"

"Why no, sir, all quiet this morning. Except for this young lady, that is."

"And you only let people using prams into this space?"

"Why, yes. Who else would want to come in?"

"Could you swear that in the ten minutes before this young lady spoke to you, nobody came out carrying a baby?"

"Just carrying it—without a pram, you mean?"

"That's exactly what I mean. A baby with a big rattle."

"Why, yes." The commissionaire spoke tolerantly, as if Quarles was slightly out of his mind. "You see, sir, this is a *pram* park. People don't come in and out carrying babies. They leave 'em here."

"You'd notice if they did?"

"I certainly would.'

Quarles secretary, Molly Player shared a flat in Maida Vale with a girl named Beaty Barnes, who not only called herself a model, but really was one. Molly showed no surprise at seeing Quarles when he rang the doorbell at half past nine.

"Beaty's on the town and I'm all alone," she said. "I was just making coffee. Come in and have some?"

"Yes. I've got some work for you tomorrow."

"What's a telephone for? You mean you want to talk."

"All right, I want to talk."

"Irish coffee? I warn you, I shall charge it to expenses."

Quarles sipped the whiskey-laced coffee and told her about it. Talking helped to clear his mind. "Now, do you see what I see?" He ticked off the points on his fingers. "Point one, when the man rang up he didn't ask whether Gaye was at home, he simply said 'Put your husband on the line'. He knew Gaye would be at home, and this was only just after four-thirty. Lilian Wilson told me he was never home in the usual way until seven. So it was somebody who'd been keeping a close enough watch to know that Gaye had come home.

"Point two. The commissionaire, Jenkins, is ready to swear that nobody walked out of the pram park carrying a baby. So John came out in a pram. The kidnapper picked him out of one pram, put him in another, and walked out. This means it was almost certainly a woman—a man pushing a pram is much more noticeable. And it's not easy to get rid of a pram without attracting notice. The adds are—I wouldn't put it higher than this—that the kidnapper is somebody who's living in Wimbledon, near enough to the Gayes to keep an eye on them. Somebody who has one child, hence the pram. Probably someone who's talked to Lilian Wilson. Agreed?"

Quarles spread out a map on the floor. "Here's a map of Wimbledon. I want you to cover the streets round and about Elder Grove, using the old sales promotion routine. But it's got to be something with special application to babies."

"A new nappy service?"

"Perfect. I want to know who's got babies, how many they've got, all about their husbands. Look out particularly for recent arrivals, and for husbands who work at home. Here's a picture of baby John, though all babies look alike to me. He's got fair hair and brown eyes. All right?"

"I suppose so. It has occurred to you that the nursemaid or the commissionaire or even your

honourable client may be lying?"

"That's exactly why I came to see you." Quarles smiled at her sweetly. "Tomorrow will see a reversal of the proper order of life in a detective agency. *I* shall be sitting in the office making and taking telephone calls. *You* will be on the road doing the leg work. Take my advice and wear flat-heeled shoes."

Wednesday, 28th September

Quarles sat in the office for most of the day. He received two enquiries for his services; one from a woman who wanted to obtain divorce case evidence against her husband, and the other from a store manager who wanted him to investigate a series of petty thefts from the jewellery department. Quarles politely declined the first, and advised the store manager to check on his house detective. "Either he's corrupt or he's inefficient. If you put a tail on to him you can find out which."

He spent the rest of his time on the Gaye kidnapping case. He had a friend who was a director of one of the bigger insurance companies, and the friend told him that Roger Gaye had a high reputation as an up-and-coming partner in a lively firm.

"No bad habits? Women, drink, gambling?"

"Nothing like that been round the grape-vine. As far as I know he's an extremely good chap. Of course, if you know anything to the contrary—"

"No, no," Quarles said hastily. "Suppose Gaye wanted to put his hands quickly on a lot of money—say, twenty thousand pounds—for his personal use. How easy do you think it would be?"

"That I can only make a guess at, I don't know anything about his private affairs. I shouldn't think he'd have that much money lying around, if that's what you mean."

"There are no rumours of his being hard up?"

"No. But there will be soon, if you make many phone calls like this one. What's it all about, Quarles?"

"Just routine," Quarles said, and hung up. He felt he could dismiss the remote possibility that Gaye had faked the kidnapping himself.

The agency through which the Gayes had hired Lilian Wilson were emphatic that she was a perfectly nice, respectable girl. She was the daughter of an army officer, had been on their books for three years, and had four jobs in that time, in each of which she had given satisfaction. Her previous employers had parted with her only because they were going to South Africa, and Lilian wanted to stay in England.

The personnel manager of McClure's said that Robert Jenkins was personally very well known to him. He had been with the firm for ten years and his record was excellent.

This was all negative information, but it was satisfactory in a way. Quarles got out his car and drove to Wimbledon. . . .

When Molly Player left her flat that morning she went to a large store and bought four dozen nappies. She then called on a friend in the printing business who printed some cards for her, and also stencilled an armband which read: *Chafeless Nappies Limited, Sales Demonstrator.* Thus equipped, and wearing a pair of flat-heeled shoes, she set off for Wimbledon.

Her technique did not vary. When the door was opened, she said, accompanying the words with a smile of saccharine sweetness, "Good morning. I am your Chafeless Nappies demonstrator. Are you lucky enough to have a baby in the family?" When the answer was "No", she asked what other families in the street had babies. When it was "Yes", she said that her firm was offering free samples, and suggested that she should see the baby and put on its special, free-gift Chafeless Nappy herself.

The idea worked almost too well. By the time she had fitted fresh nappies on to a dozen squalling babies, Molly felt that she had taken on a job that involved devotion far beyond the line of duty. There seemed to be altogether too many mothers with young babies living in this part of Wimbledon, and they took altogether too kindly to the idea of the Chafeless Nappy service.

It was after three o'clock in the afternoon when she rang the bell of one of the red brick Edwardian houses on the corner of Elder Grove and Frant Street. The sour-faced woman who opened the door said "No babies here", and then perfunctorily added, "Try the Bennetts, first floor." The woman who came down when Molly pressed the bell with "Bennett" written on it was blue-eyed, slightly Nordic, and a little flustered. She did not look like a kidnapper—but then, what does a kidnapper look like? Molly went into her speech. The woman looked at her doubtfully.

"It's nice of you, but I think Billy's all right really."

"Just feel these, Mrs. Bennett."

The woman felt one of the nappies, and made the accurate observation that they felt like any other nappies to her. There was a sudden squawk from above. "There," Molly said brightly. "B a b y ' s uncomfortable. Won't you let me—"

It was at this point that the man came down the stairs, saying pleasantly enough, "What is

it, Elsa?" He said it pleasantly enough, and he was smiling, but Molly disliked him on sight. He was again, she supposed, a Nordic type, but his blue eyes were cased in layers of flesh, and his straw-coloured hair looked like a wig.

"Let the young lady come up, let her come up by all means," he said in that pleasant but impersonal voice. "Billy's a bit naughty today, perhaps these special nappies will stop his crying." Again the words were innocuous enough, the words any father might have used, but something about the way they were spoken made Molly want to shiver.

The baby lay in a new-looking carry-cot in a disorderly and dirty room, its face red with crying. Did it look like the Gaye baby? Molly simply couldn't tell. She picked it up and put on one of the nappies, painfully conscious of the man's unwinking regard. Miraculously the crying stopped. The baby stared up at her solemnly. Looking down, Molly saw and realized something, something she should have noticed at once.

"You're a wonder," the man said. Was there a mocking note in his voice? "Really knows how to look after a baby, doesn't she, Elsa?"

"Billy hasn't b e e n much trouble," the woman said. "Been ever so quiet."

"Until the last day or so, my dear," the man said, savouring his private joke.

Molly wanted nothing more than to get out of the flat. Instead she said, "Have you been here long?"

"Three months," the man said. "Why?"

"No special reason. There seem to be a lot of new arrivals in this part of Wimbledon, that's all. And if you wanted a regular supply of nappies we'd need a permanent address."

"We'll let you know," the man said. "Won't we, Elsa?"

"Yes. Yes, we'll do that." The woman spoke in a strangled voice. She was looking at the baby.

Molly had reached the door when the man said, "We don't know where to contact you. You'll be in the telephone book?"

"Not yet." She handed him one of the cards which bore the name Chafeless Nappies Limited, with Quarles' Trafalgar Square telephone number and address. "This is our temporary address."

She almost ran down the stairs. In the hall there was a pram, and in the pram was what she took at first for a baby, well covered up. Then she saw that it was a large and extremely lifelike doll. Beside the doll was a large rattle.

A badly shaken Molly told her

story to Quarles and the Gayes. "So Mrs. Bennett simply walked round to McClure's with the doll in the pram, hidden under blankets and with the pram hood up, picked up John, put him in the pram with the doll and walked away," Quarles said. "It's very possible."

Roger Gaye was incredulous. "You mean to tell me that John is here in Wimbledon, just at the end of this road? I can't believe it."

"But it's not their child," Molly said. She repeated again what she had seen.

"Perhaps they adopted him."

"I know—I tell you I *know* they're the kidnappers. The woman's not so bad, but the man is horrible.

"I have faith in Molly," Quarles said. "Assume that her story's true. What can we do about it?"

"Go in and get John," Roger Gaye said. "With a gun."

"And if we're mistaken you'll end up in prison . . . Even if we're right, you'll be risking John's life."

"Wait till they take the baby out, then?"

"If they've got any sense, they won't." Quarles snapped his fingers. "One of the women who talked to Lilian Wilson was named Bennett. Let's talk to Lilian."

Yes, a pale-faced Lillian Wilson said, the Mrs. Bennett who spoke to her had been a blue-eyed blonde. No, she hadn't seen the Bennett baby. Billy had not been well, so Mrs. Bennett kept him indoors.

"It fits together," Quarles said.

Gaye had been listening with unconcealed impatience. "I want to know what we're going to do. This famous discovery of yours seems to have got us nowhere."

Quarles put his finger-tips together. "I suggest we wait."

Thursday, 29th September

The third telephone call came at ten o'clock in the morning. "Mr. Gaye," the blurred voice said. "Have you got the money?"

"I shall have it by tomorrow morning."

"Good. In one pound notes, please. Not new ones."

"All right."

The voice became brisk. "You will receive final instructions later."

"What about John?"

"He will be returned when our transaction is completed."

"But—" Gaye said, and then stopped. The line was dead.

Thursday was a waiting day. It was important to watch the Bennett's flat, yet vital also that the couple should have no suspicions. From a summerhouse in the Gayes' garden it was possible to see the gate of the red brick Edwardian house at the

top of Elder Grove, and Roger Gaye and Molly Player took turns keeping watch on it.

A waiting day—but there were still things to be done. Quarles found out that the flat had been let to the Bennetts by a local estate agent named Robinson. He went to see Robinson. The Bennetts had come along just over three months ago, the agent said, and had looked at the properties on his books. They had finally settled on the house at the corner of Elder Grove.

Quarles said, "Did you see if they had a baby?"

"No. Look here, you'd better tell me what's wrong."

"I suspect the Bennetts of blackmailing a client of mine. I don't believe there is a baby. I can't tell you more than that. Did you get references!"

"No. They paid six months' rent in advance."

Quarles hesitated, then decided to ask no more questions. Nor did he dare to make any enquiries about the Bennetts from local traders, in case they should hear of them. He returned to the Gayes' house, which he entered by a gate in the back garden. There, in the summerhouse, he and the Gayes and Molly Player watched and waited. Nothing happened.

Friday, 30th September

Just after midnight Roger Gaye said, "I don't see any use in staying out in this summerhouse for the rest of the night."

"You go to bed. Molly and I will watch," Quarles said.

Gaye exploded, "You don't think I mind sitting up and watching, do you? It's just that this seems—well, futile."

"Suppose it is?" Quarles spoke without any of his usual urbanity. "I advised you to call in the police – you remember? You wouldn't do it, you wanted me. That means we do things my way. It's too late to back out now."

In the end, Gaye, Quarles and Molly took two-hour turns to watch during the night, and it was Gaye who saw a man with fair hair leave the brick house at six-thirty in the morning, and briskly turn the corner into Frant Street. He went to Quarles, and shook his shoulder. The big man was dozing.

"Now what do we do?" Gaye asked.

"We wait."

The last telephone message came from a call-box just after eight-thirty in the morning. Five minutes after receiving it, Roger Gaye set out in his car for Chobham Common, between Chertsey and Bagshot. He took with him a large brown paper parcel, stuffed not with pound notes but with piece of torn-up paper. He left his parcel, as he had been told to do on the telephone, at

a point just beyond a certain cross-roads on the Common. He drove straight back to Wimbledon.

At nine o'clock Molly Player, wearing the armband of a Chafeless Nappies demonstrator, rang the bell of the Bennetts' flat. Quarles stood concealed in the embrasure of the door. Mrs. Bennett put her head out of a window.

"Oh, it's you. We don't want anything."

"This is important," Molly said. "I'm afraid I left the wrong type of nappy, Mrs. Bennett."

The window slammed shut. Feet descended the stairs, and the door opened a few inches. Quarles pushed it wide, and caught hold of the woman. "Mrs. Bennett, I'm a private detective. I believe that you have here the child of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Gaye—"

The woman screamed and dropped to the floor in a faint . .

They found John Gaye upstairs in his carry-cot, dirty but unharmed. Molly took him back to his mother, while Quarles telephoned the police. Bennett was caught at Waterloo Station as he was boarding a train for Wimbledon. He was identified as a man named "Fingers" Lyne, who had served four sentences for extortion and blackmail. His "wife" was a woman named Paddy Doner, who acted as the come-on girl in his blackmail racket.

"He's a nasty customer," Quarles' friend Inspector Leeds said to him afterwards. "I wouldn't have given much for that kid's life if you hadn't got 'Fingers' out of the way. But I don't see how this young lady spotted that the 'Bennetts' weren't what they seemed to be."

"I just knew that the baby couldn't be their own, that's all," Molly said. "The baby had brown eyes, and both 'Bennett' and the girl had blue eyes. It's a simple fact of genetics that blue-eyed parents don't have brown-eyed babies."

ALL IN THE FAMILY

The Czechoslovak Ambassador in London recently complained to the British Foreign Office. He had found a microphone hidden in his desk and his reaction to this was immediate — and rather blunt.

Upon investigation, however, it was discovered that the microphone wires led to the office next door, occupied by a gentleman described, rather curiously, as His Excellency's "own private detective" . . . .

the man in the alley

by Edward D. Hoch

BEN SNOW looked up from the fresh deck of cards at the tall man across the table. The other players had drifted away, cursing the luck of the cards and the skill of the dealer, and this was the only customer now. Ben waited until he'd dealt two hands of Black Jack, winning on both, then said quietly, "Find anything?"

The tall man nodded slightly. He was handsome, well dressed, and half French. His name was Claude Musset and he worked out of the New Orleans office of Pinkerton's National Detective Agency. "I think we have him located for you, Mr. Snow."

"Where?"

"St. Louis."

"What name is he using?"

Claude Musset frowned a bit in uncertainty. "I'd rather tell you that in St. Louis. Can you be there by Friday?"

Ben gave only a passing consideration to the job and the girl who'd held him in Kansas City this long. If the man he wanted was in St. Louis, that was where he would be on Friday. "I'll get a train out of here tomorrow night," he told Musset.

"Fine. Meet me at the new Art

The more Ben Snow watched him, the more convinced he became that this was the man who could give him a life of peace after all these years of flight and violence — and deaths. . . . Another Ben Snow story by Edward D. Hoch, widely published in this field, who lives and works in upper New York State.

building in Forest Park on Friday morning at nine. He's living near there."

"All right," Ben said. "Another hand?"

The Pinkerton man shook his head. "A couple more and you'll have won enough for our fee. Goodbye, Mr. Snow."

Ben waited until the other dealer relieved him on the hour. Then he strolled slowly through the gilt-edged palace of splendor, searching for the head man. The bar was filling slowly with the week night's usual crowd, mingling east and west, city and frontier, with a scattering of war veterans. "I was right behind Teddy going up San Juan Hill, and now he's the Vice-President!" Ben smiled a little and kept on going. For as small a war as it had been, there sure were a lot of veterans around these days. And they all knew Teddy Roosevelt personally.

Back in his room, a little place that never pretended to be home, he started packing a suitcase. He'd told the boss he was leaving, and now Jane was the only one left to tell. There was no one else in Kansas City who would care.

She came in while he was packing. "Going some where?"

"Away for a few days. To St. Louis. I'll be back."

"What's in St. Louis?"

Business."

"The Frenchman?" He'd told her about it one night, told her more than he should have.

"Yes, if you must know. He's found my man."

"Does it mean so much to you, Ben? Does it mean more than your job . . . and me?"

He sat down on the bed and pulled her to him, feeling the smoothness of her familiar flesh beneath the dress. "Jane, Jane—look at me. I'm forty-one years old, and what have I done with my life? Cowboy, army scout, bartender, dealer in a gambling house—a different job, a different town, every year. I settle down and lead a normal life until someone happens through who knows the name, or the face, or the story. Ben Snow, sure! The fastest shot in the west, the man who's really Billy the Kid because everyone knows Billy isn't dead."

"Ben. . ."

"In every town it was the same. Either I ran or I stayed. And when I stayed I ended up killing someone. They all wanted a shot at Billy the Kid. Or they wanted to hire my gun for their own purposes."

"But that's gone now, Ben! This is 1901—the 20th Century! The west is tamed. No one wears a gun any more, at least not in Kansas City."

"This was about as far east as I could go, but even here it wasn't far enough to outrun the stories. I tried changing my

name, but it didn't help. Nothing helped, until I hired the Pinkerton man. You see, I got to thinking that all these stories couldn't just be rumors. Maybe Billy the Kid didn't die in 1881 in New Mexico. Maybe he was still alive, and if I found him it would end my troubles."

"And now the Frenchman has found him?"

Ben shrugged. "He's been looking for six months. He found something — someone — in St. Louis, but I don't know just what. Don't you see that I have to go there?"

"I see. I suppose I see what it means to you, Ben."

He kissed her gently. "I'll be back."

"Unless you find him. Unless you find him, Ben, and he kills you."

"Don't worry your head about that. I'm too young to die."

"If Billy's alive, he's the same age, Ben. Maybe he thinks he's too young, too."

"Maybe. . . ."

St. Louis sprawled in the August heat. And at the western edge of the sprawl was Forest Park, a rambling wild which now hummed with the toil of man. The Louisiana Purchase Exposition was still nearly three years off, but already the place was beginning to take shape. Over 1200 acres of ground were being cleared, with scores of holes marking the early stages of temporary and permanent construction. The Art building was little more than another hole in the earth when Billy finally located it, and he sat down under a nearby tree to wait for Musset.

He didn't like the heat, and never had. Here, along the great Mississippi, there was not the dryness of the desert trail but rather a sort of humid mist that clammed his skin. He felt in one pocket for the little Derringer he always carried, and then took a copy of *Plenty's Weekly* out of the other pocket. From Kansas City eastward, everyone read Arthur S. Plenty's sharp-tongued views on politics and world affairs, and it hadn't taken Ben long to acquire the habit. *President Vacations in Ohio While Supreme Court Denies Citizenship to Puerto Ricans,* one subhead read, and though it wasn't strictly accurate, it made good reading for Plenty's people.

Ben was plowing through an editorial about the year-old assassination of Italy's King Humbert when the tall Pinkerton man came into view through the trees. "You're late." Ben greeted him. "I was beginning to think I had the wrong place."

Musset smiled. "A lovely park, isn't it? Your first trip to St. Louis?"

"My first. Where's our man?"

"Well, I fear I have some bad

news for you, my friend. He's gone."

"Gone! After I came all the way here?"

"Listen, please. Just listen. Our man, using the name of William Kidd—"

"That's him! William Kidd—Billy the Kid!" Ben could feel his heart beating faster.

Musset smiled his slow smile. "Don't jump to conclusions. That is what people have been doing about you for nearly twenty years, remember. Unfortunately, the name is our strongest piece of evidence. William Kidd is the right age, and he has lived in the west, but that's all I can tell you. Here in St. Louis he's been doing odd jobs, and associating with some most interesting people."

"Who, for instance?"

"He has a wife—or mistress—named Sadie, who travels with him. They had an apartment just beyond the park until yesterday. And he frequently associates with a woman Anarchist named Emma Goldman, who has quite a reputation. She's from Rochester, in New York State, and she travels about the country making speeches for the cause."

"If she's still here can't we question her as to where Kidd might have gone?"

"Oh, I know where he's gone. He and Sadie bought train tickets for Buffalo."

"Buffalo!"

"It's near Rochester, and it might mean some sort of Anarchist meeting. On the other hand, perhaps Kidd just likes fairs. The Pan-American Exposition is on in Buffalo now and a number of St. Louis people are up there looking around, getting ideas for 1904, you know."

"Could we go there?" Ben asked. "I've come this far."

The Frenchman smiled. "I anticipated you. I have already notified my office that we'd be traveling to Buffalo."

Ben laughed and they started out of the park together. "You really think this man might be Billy, Claude?" he asked, using the detective's given name for the first time.

"Who knows, my friend? Perhaps he is only the descendent of Captain Kidd. . . ."

The train to Buffalo was crowded and hot, and even a summer cloudburst on the way did little to comfort Ben. It was more than a year since he'd been on a horse—perhaps this was progress, but the new modes of transport didn't excite him. Trains seemed to Ben to be built more for travel by animals than humans, and as they journeyed northeast his dislike of the conveyance and the countryside only heightened. Chimneys and mills and streets crowded with carriages, people and more

people. Kansas City and even St. Louis seemed lovely by the time they reached Pittsburgh, a hulk of a place.

Buffalo was smaller, but the crush of humanity seemed even more intense. Everywhere there was talk of the Exposition, and visitors — both American and Canadian — were pouring into the summer place. "I don't see any buffalo," Ben said, though he hadn't really expected to.

Musset shrugged. "Used to be called Buffalo Creek. Named after an Indian or something."

"How do we find Kidd and the girl in this mob?"

He gave Ben his slow smile. "That is my job. Stay near the hotel and I'll contact you in a day or so."

Ben didn't like it, but there wasn't much he could do. He spent the next day roaming the streets, where newsboys on busy corners sold day-old copies of the *New York Times,* and *Plenty's Weekly*, and the Buffalo papers. He stopped for a beer in a new bar equipped with electric lights, then wandered back to the hotel. At six o'clock, Musset joined him.

"It was less trouble than I expected," the detective told him. "Kidd's friend Emma Goldman lectured in Cleveland last May, and while she was there she met a man named Leon Czolgosz."

"What in hell kind of a name is that?"

"Polish. He's been hanging around the fringes of these Anarchist groups for some time. But the point is that he's living now in West Seneca, just outside Buffalo. He has a room in a boarding house there, and Kidd visited him this afternoon."

"Where's Kidd staying?"

"Here in town, with Sadie. They have a room over John Nowak's saloon on Broadway. 1078 Broadway. He may be the man you're looking for, but he's certainly not suspicious at this point. I followed him all the way back from West Seneca without attracting attention."

"Thanks, Claude. That's all the information I need." The Derringer in Ben's pocket felt suddenly heavy. After all these years he was about to meet this man—Willian Kidd, William Bonney, Billy the Kid—who'd been only a name till now.

"Don't get your hopes up, my friend," Musset cautioned. "For all we know the real Billy might be in that New Mexico grave."

"I just want to talk with him. I'll be careful."

"He has friends. But I can tell you this Czolgosz will be out of town. He received a telegram while I was watching the place, and with a bit of a bribe at the Western Union office I managed to get a glimpse of a copy. It was from New York,

from someone calling himself *The Asp*. He instructed Czolgosz to take a boat to Cleveland tonight, and return here Saturday."

"The Asp? You're sure you haven't been reading those Nick Carter books, Claude?"

The detective smiled. "Anarchists are an odd lot. They like all this intrigue and chasing about. But there seems to be something big in the wind."

"Well," Ben said, thinking out loud, this is Thursday. If Kidd's friend is away till Saturday that should give me time to see him. Maybe I could be heading west again by the first of the week."

"Monday's a sort of holiday—Labor Day. We could stay over and take in the fair."

"Even holidays I never heard of! These eastern cities have everything."

"They even have laws against killing people, my friend. Different laws from the west."

Ben chuckled easily, but his hand went again to the pistol in his pocket. "Don't worry, I can't use him dead. If he's Billy I want him alive and kicking."

He left Musset in the lobby of their hotel about eight o'clock and went to the little Broadway hotel where Kidd was staying. But neither he nor the girl were in their room, and after a three hour wait Ben gave it up for the night. He went back to his room, a bit discouraged, wondering what Claude Musset had found to do in this strange city so far from home.

Friday was warm, with scattered white clouds that seemed about to converge into a solid cover. Musset was still off on some mysterious mission, so Ben went again to the hotel over Nowak's saloon. This time he was in luck. The room clerk cast a tired eye around the little room that passed for the lobby and pointed. "Sure. That's Mr. Kidd and his wife just going into the bar." Ben thanked him and followed.

William Kidd was a little man who looked younger than the forty-one years he should have been. But then Billy had always looked like a boy, which explained the nickname that had followed him for so many years. The more Ben watched him from his vantage point at the bar, the more convinced he became that here surely was the man he sought, the man who could give him a life of peace after all these years of flight and violence. He'd been so interested in Kidd that he'd hardly noticed the girl Sadie. She must have been ten years younger, with a face at once pretty and hardened. She was a western girl, from further west than St. Louis. Ben had seen her type before, in the bars and even on the trails. A mining camp girl, an army post girl—wherever

there were men with money to spend.

He was about to join them on some pretext when he noticed Claude Musset at the door, scanning the faces along the bar. Ben downed his beer and strolled slowly over to join him. "Looking for me?"

Musset gave a brief nod. "I thought you'd be here. Talked to Kidd yet?"

"No. I was just about to."

"Be careful. We're getting into something big. Too big. They're dangerous men."

"How dangerous?"

Musset wasn't smiling today. "I went back to Czolgosz's boarding house. He paid for his room with a defective revolver he no longer needed. I assume he has another weapon."

"You worry about Czolgosz. This Kidd's my man."

Musset nodded. "I'll see you back at the hotel."

Ben went back to his place at the bar and ordered another beer. When he turned toward the table again he was startled to see that Kidd was gone. Sadie sat alone, fingering her empty glass. Well, maybe he'd just stepped into the men's room. Ben decided it was the perfect opportunity to move in. He picked up his glass and walked over to the table.

"Lonesome?" He knew the approach would neither surprise nor anger a girl of her type.

"Beat it, mister."

"Just thought you might like a drink."

"Blow!"

"That man you were sitting with looked familiar."

"He's my husband, and he'd like to rattle your skull if he caught you talking with me."

"I'll take that chance." He pulled over an empty chair and sat down. "The man I know is named William Kidd. That your husband?"

Her eyes narrowed with suspicion. "How do you know him?"

"Back in New Mexico, long time ago."

"I never knew he came from New Mexico. You sure?"

Ben retreated a bit. "Well, we can ask him when he comes back. Where'd he go?"

"You got me," she said with a shrug. "But he probably won't be back for a while."

Ben finally talked her into having another drink, and they sat for a time in uneasy conversation. Sadie apparently had met Kidd some two years earlier in Texas. They'd travelled to St. Louis, been married there, and settled down to — what? Ben didn't miss the fact that Sadie carefully avoided mentioning her husband's occupation. Toward midnight it became obvious that Kidd would not return, and she excused herself to return to the room. Ben had one

more beer, then headed home himself.

There was some sort of commotion in the street before the hotel—a growing crowd of nighttime people milling in a widening circle. As Ben started to press his way through, a woman toward the center of the crowd screamed. "He's dead!" someone else shouted. Ben's heart beat a little faster, as if he knew what he would find even before he saw it. Stretched in the gaslight's glow, his face not twisted nor even pained—more surprised, if anything.

Claude Musset, a detective and almost a friend, a man who shouldn't be dead. But was. With the knife still deep in his chest. "I saw him staggering. I thought he was drunk." Just a few minutes sooner, five minutes, ten minutes, and Claude might have been alive. "Has someone called the police?" Ben turned away, feeling sick, feeling useless, as if all this searching, this trip halfway across the country, had been all for such an ending.

The violence was still pursuing him. Even here among the easterners there was only death. And death was the same anywhere. . . .

Ben didn't sleep that night. He sat up instead at the hotel room window, watching the comings and goings in the dim street below, occasionally rolling a cigarette and smoking it to a half-inch butt. With luck the hotel staff wouldn't link him to Musset, and he wasn't about to volunteer anything to the police. He was a stranger in a far country, and all he knew of eastern police were the universal stories of the "Third Degree", the "Sweat Box", and the rubber hoses, used indiscriminately on men and women alike. He had no hankering for that sort of thing, and if anyone was to avenge Musset's murder it was certainly up to him. He'd hired the Frenchman, brought him to Buffalo on the trail of a man perhaps twenty years dead.

But Musset then had mentioned something "big", something apparently even bigger than the discovery of a living Billy the Kid. Ben puzzled over that for some time, trying to fit together the pieces of what he'd seen and heard. The detective's killer, it seemed, must be one of three persons—Kidd, Sadie, or Czolgosz—since these were the only ones he'd had any contact with in Buffalo. Those three—and the mysterious name in the telegram, *The Asp*. But Ben himself had spent the evening talking with Sadie in a bar, and Czolgosz was supposedly in Cleveland for the day. That left Kidd as the best bet for the killing, and now Ben remembered all too well how he'd left the

bar right after Musset. Had he noticed the detective lurking around earlier in the week. and followed him from the bar to knife him in some shadowed place within sight of the hotel? and what had Musset discovered that made his death necessary?

It was dawn when Ben finally settled down on the bed, with the breeze from Lake Erie cooling the room so that he needed a blanket. He slept. . . .

The Saturday papers were full of the murder, though Musset had not yet been identified as a Pinkerton detective. Ben anticipated another rash of headlines when that fact reached the newsmen. It was early evening when he made his way back to the Broadway hotel, half expecting that Kidd and Sadie would already be gone, in flight like the autumn birds to some distant, uncertain location. But they were still registered, though not present at the moment. Ben waited around a while and then went back to his hotel. If they were still in town they apparently were going to ride out the storm of the murder. Perhaps, if he was lucky, they hadn't even noticed him speaking with Musset at the bar.

On Sunday his luck was better. It was the first of September, and the following day was the semi-holiday, Labor Day, which Musset had mentioned. It was hot in the city that afternoon, with shirt-sleeved men watching longingly as bartenders rolled barrels of beer into dim caves of coolness. Ben was having a beer at the bar beneath the hotel when he saw Kidd in the little lobby, greeting a slender man with slightly stooped shoulders and a smooth, round face. He strolled casually over to the door until he was within earshot.

"You get in last night, Leon?" Kidd asked.

"Yeah. Took the boat back," said the dull-eyed man, who must have been Czolgosz. "How are things?"

"Good. We're meeting him at ten tonight."

Czolgosz nodded and they went past Ben into the bar. If Kidd recognized him as Musset's companion, he gave no sign. Ben waited until they were seated over their beers, then went out to the sweaty room clerk. "See that little brown-haired guy in there?"

"Yeah."

"He staying here?"

"Yeah."

"What's his name."

"John Doe.'

"You kidding?"

"Look, mister, you asked me his name. He's registered as John Doe and that's all I can tell you. We don't ask questions."

"Thanks,' Ben said with a sigh, turning away. And what did it

all mean? Czolgosz had used his real name just a few days earlier without apparent worry. Was this new secrecy connected somehow with Musset's killing?

He thought about it most of the evening, and that night at ten he was standing in the shadows across Broadway from the hotel. They came out together, Kidd and Czolgosz, walking purposefully down the nearly deserted street. About a half-block from the hotel they paused at the mouth of a narrow alley, looked both ways, and entered it. Ben crossed the street after them, his right hand curled lovingly about the cool metal of the Derringer in his pocket.

The gaslight was far enough down the block so he entered the alleyway in deep shadow, moving his left hand along the routh brick of the wall to guide him. The alley ran through to the next street, and there the gaslight was almost at its entrance, so that the three figures were silhouetted to his eye. Three—Kidd and Czolgosz and a third man, much bigger. Their conversation was low, but something changed hands — an envelope perhaps, for Kidd and another for Czolgosz. Something on the big man's hand, perhaps a diamond ring, caught the light and sparkled a moment. Then it was over. The big man looked over his shoulder at a waiting carriage under the gaslight. Ben drew the little gun from his pocket, knowing he must act now or not at all.

But what could he do? Shoot them down in an alley for a crime they might know nothing about? Perhaps Musset had been the simple victim of an attempted robbery. No, for now the gun had to stay silent. Ben backed carefully out of the alley and ran silently up the block to a convenient doorway. In a moment Kidd and Czolgosz were visible, heading back in the direction of the hotel.

But now the hunt began in earnest for Ben. As he had once tracked Indians across the western plains for the Army, he now tracked these two through the streets of Buffalo. He was back at the hotel early Monday morning, ready to stay with the first one who came out. This day it was Kidd, who did nothing more than wander aimlessly about the downtown area. But he had better luck next time, when he followed Czolgosz to a Main Street shop and stood only a few feet away while the little man bought a .32 Iver Johnson revolver with an owl's head stamped on either side of its hard rubber handle. It cost four dollars and a half.

On Wednesday evening there was a stir of activity through the city with the arrival of the President to attend the Exposition the following day. His

wife's illness had caused him to miss the original date back in June, but now the city was giving him a regal welcome, complete with the booming of cannon in the evening air. Kidd and Czolgosz were up in their rooms, but Ben found Sadie once more alone in the bar.

"Hello, there," he said, sitting down without an invitation.

"Oh! You again."

"Not down greeting the President at the station?"

"Not me. I leave that politics stuff to my husband."

Ben signalled the bartender for a couple of beers. "I'm still trying to see him."

"He's around all the time. Him and his friend."

"Do they have a job here?"

"Who knows? As long as there's money coming in, I don't ask questions." She lifted the beer and downed half of it without pausing for breath. "Good. I was thirsty."

"How much longer you going to be around? I'd still like to catch your husband."

"He said something about leaving the end of the week."

This time Ben didn't stay long with her. It wouldn't do for Kidd to find them together, not just then. But soon, before the end of the week, Ben was going to have to act.

On Thursday Czolgosz travelled, with fifty thousand others, to the Exposition where President McKinley delivered a surprising speech modifying his views on reciprocal trade. Ben paid little attention to the speech, but the place itself fascinated him. There were pavilions and displays everywhere—bearing such wondrous names as the Temple of Music, and the Fountain of Abundance, and the Court of Lilies. There was, toward evening, the giant cream-colored Tower of Light, more than four hundred feet tall and lit by thirty-five thousand electris light bulbs. The buildings, for the most part, had the massive Spanish look of mission architecture, in keeping with the Pan-American theme. And everywhere there were these wonderful electric lights, powered (in some manner unfathomable to Ben) by the waters of Niagara Falls some fifteen miles away.

As the lights were starting to go on, Czolgosz left the Exposition and wandered back downtown, where he sat alone in the park until ten. It was a dull sort of a night, warm and dull, but to Ben—the silent watcher—it had the muggy feel of impending doom.

On Friday morning, with Kidd's hours in the city growing shorter all the time—at least according to Sadie—Ben knew he must do something. Still, perhaps this would be the day they'd reveal themselves some-

how. He chuckled to himself, thinking that his indecision reminded him of a fellow named Hamlet in a play he'd seen in Kansas City.

So he followed Czolgosz again. The slender man seemed to move with purpose this morning. He bought a cigar at the bar, then strolled a few blocks till he came to an open sewer. He paused a moment, dropped a bundle of papers down it, then kept walking. In a small side-street restaurant he ate breakfast, then paused at a barber shop for a shave. He boarded a streetcar for Niagara Falls, but soon changed his mind and returned to downtown Buffalo. All the time he seemed to be preparing—for what?

In the afternoon, at a little after two, he returned once more to the sprawling grounds of the Pan-American Exposition, with Ben not far behind. Presently he joined a line waiting outside the Temple of Music, standing patiently beneath the sculptured heads of composers which looked down upon the scene. Ben stood a little apart, watching, and presently he asked a passing policeman, "What's the line for?"

"Shake hands with the President. Four o'clock. Better get your place."

"Thanks." Ben watched the line with a puzzled frown and began to roll a cigarette. Somehow Czolgosz hadn't seemed the type to stand under the hot sun waiting to shake the President's hand. Then, as his eyes scanned the crowd, he picked out Kidd, lounging casually near the cooling Fountain of Abundance. Both of them, here together!

At four o'clock the lofty doors of the Temple of Music swung open, and the Presidential reception had begun. The line of waiting public moved between a double row of police and soldiers, toward the President in his black frock coat and white vest. A few men, apparently Secret Service agents, stood by him. It was hot under the hundred-and-eighty-foot dome of the place, and a number of people were wiping the sweat away with their handkerchiefs.

Ben watched it all from the doorway. He watched Kidd casual in the heat, watched Czolgosz produce a bulky handkerchief from his pocket, watched a man with a bandaged hand now greeting the President.

And then he saw it.

Czolgosz was not using his handkerchief to wipe away the sweat—he was holding it against his body, as if his hand too were bandaged. But there was nothing wrong with Leon Czolgosz's hand!

Nothing wrong. Something wrong. Everything wrong!

Czolgosz was in front of Pre-

sident McKinley now, being urged along gently by one of the guards. Ben's hand dropped to the Derringer in his pocket. Only seconds. God, seconds. . . .

Czolgosz fired twice through the handkerchief.

McKinley shivered, straightened in astonishment, and began to fall, falling as soldiers and guards flung themselves upon the assassin and clubbed him to the floor, his handkerchief ablaze from the powder, fists and rifles beating at him. "Be easy with him, boys!" McKinley called bloody from the stomach, but alive.

"I done my duty," Czolgosz muttered as they dragged him away still beating him, slapping him, punching him.

Ben watched it all with a sort of disbelief chilling his spine. When he looked around for Kidd he was gone, into the madness of humanity that surged and screamed and scrambled on all sides. What was there to do now? What was there to do, now that he knew the thing Claude Musset had died knowing. . . .?

A President does not die unnoticed in America, and though it took McKinley eight days to breath his last, the shock waves had already gone out across the nation. Czolgosz admitted under the third degree that he was an Anarchist, though he constantly refused to implicate others in the plot. But the very word Anarchist was enough to inflame the countryside. Arrests were made from New York to New Mexico, and in Wyoming a Czolgosz sympathizer was tarred and feathered. In New York, *Plenty's Weekly* rushed a special edition through the presses while the police were still trying to get the facts from Czolgosz, and thundered editorially: "A two-bit Anarchist with a four-fifty pistol has plunged the nation into turmoil, and as President McKinley lies between life and death in a Buffalo home, the eyes of America are on Theodore Roosevelt, who might at any moment become the youngest man ever to serve as President of these United States."

After days of questioning, Czolgosz admitted his connections with Emma Goldman, though he denied she's had a hand in the crime. A warrant was issued for her arrest in St. Louis, but she fled the city before it could be served, fearing harsh treatment by the police there. She finally surrendered a few days later to Chicago police, but she fared no better with them. One officer punched her in the face, and she must have learned that the third degree was much the same in every city. Back in Rochester, meanwhile, her father was being ex-

communicated from his synagogue.

And in Buffalo, Ben Snow read all the papers, listened to all the talk, and waited. William and Sadie Kidd hadn't quite made it out of the city in time. They'd been picked up for questioning and held by the police for several days, though it seemed certain they'd be released soon unless Czolgosz broke down and told everything. At first the police had confidently asserted that others were involved in the assassination plot, but as the September days drifted on and Czolgosz maintained his silence, it seemed more and more likely to Ben that these others would escape. He thought about the shadowy man in the alley, with his flashing diamond ring, and wondered if they would ever meet.

McKinley died on September 14th, and Theodore Roosevelt became President. Two days later, on Monday, the Buffalo police released Kidd and his wife for lack of evidence. Ben followed them to the hotel while they packed, with a sense of impending doom building up within him. They were going, the police could not hold them, he could not hold them. If he went to the police with his story, what would it prove? Could he even connect the assassination with the murder of Musset a week earlier? With every tick of the clock Kidd was walking out of the scene, out of Ben's life.

And if he was Billy the Kid?

There was one thing, one way of knowing. One thing that had haunted Ben down all these years. They'd thought he was Billy because of his fast draw. Billy had been the fastest gun in New Mexico back twenty years earlier. He'd still be fast—faster than Ben maybe—but it would be a way of knowing. If Ben could get him to draw, then nick him in the shoulder or elbow, he might have the admission he needed. And if Billy couldn't swing for McKinley's assassination, there were still those twenty-one killings waiting back in New Mexico.

Ben followed them through the dark streets at a narrowing distance, seeing only a short man with a suitcase, a woman with a hatbox. He waited until their passage to the station took them along a deserted areaway, where there was no one to disturb what would happen. The doubts were still in his mind, the uncertainties, the hesitations, but he realized it was now or never. He must act or Claude Musset would have died for nothing.

"Billy!" he shouted from fifty feet away.

They turned, startled, and in the flickering of the single gas streetlight Sadie recognized him. "That's him! That's the guy

was asking me the questions!"

A little closer, so the Derringer could cover the gap. A little closer, but not too close. . . "I've followed you across the country, Billy. Draw!"

"What the hell. . .?"

"Draw!"

. . . Aim for the shoulder . . . or the elbow . . . fast, as soon as his hand comes out with the gun . . . as soon as . . .

Ben saw it coming, almost faster than the eye could follow, and felt the hairline of pain as the blade sliced through his shirt. The Derringer roared in reply, true — too true — to its mark. The shock of the knife, instead of the expected pistol had made his brain reject the carefully planned shot and the habit of a lifetime had asserted itself. Kidd staggered once, then fell on his face, his hand already groping for a second knife.

"You've killed him!" Sadie screamed. "He's dead!"

Ben walked up slowly, wiping the blood and pain from his side. "I'm sorry. I only meant to wound him." How many times had he spoken those words before, if only in his heart? The eternal lament of the gunfighter. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a few bills. "Take this. Get out of town, Sadie. . ."

But she only kept on screaming to the lonely street, and he realized with a sort of shock that she'd really loved this man crumpled now at her feet. He turned, sadly, and walked away fast—and though he remembered now the knife in Claude Musset's chest it somehow didn't help. Kidd, whoever he was, had paid for his crimes, whatever they'd been.

Away from there, away from the screaming woman and the dead man, he paused out of breath and tried to collect his thoughts. There was still one person who could tell him what he wanted to hear, one man who might know the true identity of William Kidd. The man in the alley. . . .

The offices of *Plenty's Weekly* occupied the entire ninth floor of a thin building in lower Manhattan. New York, everything about it, was unbelievable to Ben and so he simply ignored it. He had one goal in coming to the city, and when he'd risen in the ornate open grillwork elevator and waited the proper length of time he finally found himself face to face with the legend itself.

Arthur Plenty leaned back in his oversized chair and gestured toward the pitcher of beer on his desk. "Help yourself, kind sir. No one can survive New York summers without lots of beer—*plenty* of beer, you might even say! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thank you," Ben said quietly.

"And what was your business again? Busy, you know. Getting out a weekly is busy business. Ha!"

"I read your special edition on McKinley's assassination."

"Horrible thing, horrible! I only pray this man Roosevelt can hold the nation together." He poured himself a beer and scooped the sweat from his beefy face.

Ben Snow smiled thinly. "I was surprised at your concern, since you had criticized McKinley so often in the past. And you even ran an article on assassinations a while back. . ."

"Yes, yes, we did. Amazing coincidence."

"Amazing. You know, I was a sort of acquaintance of Czolgosz's up in Buffalo."

The big man's manner began to change, subtly. "You knew him?"

"Him and a few others. William Kidd, a girl named Sadie . . ."

"Yes. Well, Czolgosz received a fast but fair trial. It is all over now."

Ben nodded, unsmiling. He would have liked a cigarette, but he needed both hands free. "Czolgosz dies the end of October. But it's a shame he'll be dying alone. The man who hired him to assassinate McKinley is still at large."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Snow. No one hired Czolgosz. Heaven knows the Buffalo police tried hard enough to implicate others, but they were most unsuccesful."

"They just didn't look in the right places, Mr. Plenty. They didn't look, for instance, in the alley off Broadway when Czolgosz and Kidd were being paid for the assassination. Ten o'clock, the Sunday night before the shooting."

"You should write fiction for me, Mr. Snow." Plenty's hand went to the beer pitcher, but this time it shook a little as he poured.

"Not fiction, fact. I saw it myself. I saw a big man with a ring on his finger, very much like your ring, Mr. Plenty."

"Who are you, sir? What is your business with me?" The beer was forgotten now, and behind his head a sudden afternoon breeze was disturbing the curtains.

"I already told you my name, Mr. Plenty. My occupation might be listed as a justicer. I had a bit of justice for your friend Kidd last week."

"Kidd!"

"I killed him."

"I know no Kidd.'

"I think you do. I think you paid them both to assassinate the President. I think you're just about the leading Anarchist in the country, Mr. Plenty."

"I could have you arrested for making charges like that, Mr.

Snow. Charges without a shred of evidence to back them up." He opened a desk drawer and started to reach inside.

"The gun that killed Kidd is aimed right at your fat middle, in case you have any ideas."

He brought out a box of cigars, and the harmless gesture seemed to renew his sagging strength. "No ideas, Mr. Snow. Only a cigar—not poisonous, not exploding. I am hardly a violent man."

"You spoke of evidence a moment ago. I think I have some, in addition to my eye-witness identification. You were so anxious to get out your special edition on the assassination that you slipped a bit in your editorial. You mentioned that Czolgosz paid four dollars and fifty cents for the gun."

"I believe other papers have mentioned the fact."

"But they hadn't then—that's just the point. When you went to press Czolgosz hadn't talked yet. I knew the price the gun because I was standing next to him when he bought it. But how did you know it, Mr. Plenty? It proves you not only had contact with Czolgosz the night I saw you together, but that you had contact with him or Kidd later in the week—and that the subject of the gun was specifically discussed."

"My reporters bring me these things!" he screamed, pounding the desk. "Someone told me it cost four-fifty"

"Then there's the matter of the telegram. A friend of mine, a detective, saw a telegram from someone called *The Asp*, giving instructions to Czolgosz a week before the assassination. Sadly, my friend was too much the detective. He couldn't have really seen the words *The Asp*, because *the* is rarely used in telegrams. I haven't seen many of them, but I know too that they're printed with all capital letters. So instead of *The Asp* what my friend must have seen really were simply the capital letters *ASP*, printed together. ASP for Arthur S. Plenty."

"You call that evidence?"

"Some of the Lincoln conspirators were hanged for far less."

It got to him then, and he stopped shouting. He just sat there, gazing across the desk at Ben. "All right. How much do you want?"

"Only justice, Mr. Plenty, that all. It's my country, too."

"McKinley was no good. He deserved to die if anyone ever did."

"I'm no judge of that. And neither are you." He paused, then asked the big question: "But tell me one thing about it. This man Kidd—who was he, really?"

"I don't know—a drifter, someone Emma Goldman picked up

in St. Louis." He dismissed it with a wave of his hand. "She found Czolgosz in Cleveland."

"Was she in on the plot?"

He shook his big head. "Not really. I sent Czolgosz to Cleveland to recruit more people, but he came back empty-handed. He and Kidd were the only ones. He had lists of other Anarchists, but I made him destroy them so the police wouldn't find them in his room."

"All right," Ben said. It was another dead end. William Kidd was a buried issue.

"Do you want money?"

"No."

"What are you going to do—tell the police?"

Ben looked at him, feeling pity and revulsion mingle in his mind. "I don't know. I don't really know. I suppose I'll have to think about it." And he got up to leave. "Goodbye, Mr. Plenty."

He walked out of there and waited for the slow elevator down, really not knowing what he would do. Perhaps an unsigned letter to the police. . . .

At the entrance Ben found his passage blocked by a gathering crowd of curious, excited people. A woman was screaming and another seemed to have fainted. He fought his way through to the center of the crowd, much as he'd done that night in front of the Buffalo hotel. But this time it wasn't Claude Musset with a knife in his chest.

"He jumped! I saw him go!"

"God, what a mess. Anyone know him?"

"It's Plenty, the magazine publisher. He ate in my place every noon."

Ben walked away, feeling sick. It was a sort of justice, he supposed, but one he hadn't figured on. Still, a man who felt he could take the life of the President of the United States would probably feel no qualms about taking his own life if circumstances dictated it. There'd be no need for a letter to the police now. Czolgosz could die alone for his crime and no one would be cheated.

Except maybe the history books. . . .

NEXT MONTH—

SHE WAS "THE GIRL WHO HAD EVERYTHING" — EXCEPT WHAT SHE NEEDED MOST. AND THE SAINT DECIDED TO REMEDY THAT . . . .

THE HOPELESS HEIRESS

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

—in the July 1963 issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

black mercury

by Terence Roberts

THINGS HAD been a bit hectic at what we called H.Q. on our cay and everybody except Jimmy Lee, our communications officer, and I was off somewhere, though most of them, I have to admit, were "reporting," instead of getting on with the war. I'm convinced that wars are lost in home offices and in direct proportion to the volume of reports on file. Jimmy Lee, I should explain, was Chinese, but of British nationality, having been born in Singapore. His parents had come from the province of Yunnan and spoke a language, not just a dialect, that had everybody, including even other Chinese, completely buffaloed. This was very convenient as there were a few others who spoke that language dotted about the southern United States, central and northern South America, so that, instead of having to go through the time-wasting and often, in any case, useless business of coding, they simply chatted to each other over the air. And, boy, did it speed things up. Also, it caused a lot of very confused and often mystified locals, and several extremely frustrated Germans, Japanese "fishermen,"

Terence Allan Roberts, author of BLACK MYSTERY (SMM, April 1962) returns with another story from the Caribbean where he served with naval intelligence. Mr. Roberts, who has travelled extensively throughout the area, now lives in this country. He is the author of a number of highly technical works in another field.

and other assorted fascists and hangers-on, for they never did get on to what was up. All the Staff had been given to understand that Jimmy *was* using a code, and he made a great play with codebooks and cylinders and other paraphernalia that he kept in a safe, but which he from time to time left discreetly on display when visitors dared enter his inner sanctum. Jimmy loved this game for he had an uproarious sense of humour and one of his favourite acts was playing "the bland Oriental." It got him into some trouble, but this he enjoyed even more; and then he became the blank Oriental, and to a most aggravating degree.

The *Mercury* affair started with one of his more abstruse jokes, and this he tried out on me. I'm not a good subject for jokes, and, besides, I was in that most unenviable of positions, being what is euphemistically called "in charge." Actually I was no better off than a zoo keeper "in charge" of big cats would be if said cats were in no way confined and had a clear mandate to kill not only fair game but domestic animals, and even people. In point of fact, I was running a sort of creche and Jimmy alone really understood my position, but he just could not resist his little jokes.

On the occasion of which I speak, he strolled into my office, where I was as usual trying to cope with some damn-foolishnesses such as are rampant in wartime, and made an announcement. I was preoccupied and did not get it at first.

"What did you say?" I asked.

"I said: 'I've got some more mercury for you,'" Jimmy stated blandly.

Now, it just so happened that we had had some aggravating affairs connected with this substance, in which I had played an extremely inefficient "hero" role, and had got badly hurt into the bargain. In fact, I was still recuperating, having been in hospital for a time while the medicos had probed about for a slug from a Luger that had lodged in my right hip, and I was limping badly. Also, it still hurt. I was in no mood for pleasantries in any case, so the very word mercury brought me to the boil. (And that pun is fully intended.) I just stared at Jimmy; and he stared back; absolutely blank, and rather blase. There was a long silence; then I pulled myself together and asked, as calmly as I could:

"And am I delegated again by one of your precious Wongs (all Jimmy's Yunnanese pals were called Wong—and I mean *all* of them. This was as confusing to us at it was to the enemy, but it was a splendid trick because, even if you could listen-in in Yunnanese, you still didn't know

which Wong was which) to go pick it up?" I asked.

"No. It's coming here," Jimmy said.

This surprised me not a little, because we were resident upon a large cay covered in coconut palms and sea-grape bushes way out in the Caribbean at a point that all the local boating chaps had conceived a sudden and most obvious desire *not* to visit since the day the war started. The previous mercury, I should explain, had been discovered moving from points north and west via Mexico and Guatemala to Nicaragua (about four hundred miles south of our cay), and then, via coastal canoes, to an island, where it had been picked up by German submarines and boated over to Germany. Who, I therefore wanted to know, had suddenly decided to make *our* cay a new way-station; or were *our* boys using this most unorthodox line of communication for some mystical reason of their own—and they could think up some real lulus in that respect, I had to admit.

Then the intercom squawked —most conveniently as I thought, even then—and Jimmy rushed out of the room. There was a particularly awful noise to call each of us—all designed by Jimmy, I may add.

I sat pondering this bit of intelligence but then, since I was very busy, and short-staffed, and as things were really getting very hot all over at that time, while on the other hand we had a fine little "constabulary" of the most excellent Jamaican militia (who I swear shook the whole cay when they saluted), who could shoot awfully straight with the rather unpleasant hardware that we had installed in concealment all round the island, I decided it was better to let Jimmy take care of the matter, and went back to work.

Jimmy kept out of my hair all afternoon and he was not present at dinner, for which I was thankful, as I could get on quietly with my own laborious decoding while ingesting the inevitable red beans and rice. The gal who ran H.Q. could not read, so I could litter code books about.

I was imbibing a glass of heavy after-dinner rum, when something caught my eye in the shadows of the veranda straight ahead. Naturally I thought it was the guard who lounged, though allegedly alert, alongside that only means of ingress. However, I called out "Who's there?" and got a really terrible shock, for into the half-light of the veranda, t h e r e stepped an enormous black man, wearing only a pair of dirty dark red pants and a huge rusty chain-mail belt with a glimmering gold buckle. Then a bell rang inside me, and I sang out:

"*Raeis!* What the devil are *you* doing here; and, how the hell did you get in?" The man neither moved nor spoke but he grinned.

I have to explain about this fellow Raeis. I had got to know him some months before in that mercury business. He was a "Black Carib"; one of that (to my mind) most excellent sort of sea-gypsies who live all along the coast from Yucatan to Costa Rica, and who owe allegiance to none. They are not, of course, the true Caribs, Karibs, or Kalibi as certain South American Amerinds call themselves, but are almost pure blood West Africans who have a very long and fascinating story and a very weird one. These Black Caribs don't trust anybody and especially anybody with a pink skin; and nobody trusts them; yet this huge fellow had trusted a curious Swedish-New Zealander-turned-American, who had been on my staff for a time until he vanished forever—and partly through the good offices of this same Raeis. However, this fellow had then proceeded not only to trust me for a time but also to save my life and a lot else besides, without even being asked. I never did know why he did this, except that I once promised him that I would never give him away and, over the years, and quite a number of years, in fact, I never did. In turn, he never let me down, but I did not know future history at that moment and then had only one experience to go on. I liked Raeis as well as owing him a large debt, and I most certainly admired not only his gigantic physique but also his most pragmatic qualities of mind and estate. I had only once before seen him grin, so I barked, "Come here!"

The moment he was in the room, I held out my hand. "Where in the heck have you been?" I asked.

He came forward like a proverbial "cat" — black leopard would be better—and solemnly placed a large and grimly sharpened machete on the dinner table, and then held out his hand. We shook, and I winced.

"I come with the mercury," he said simply. And I groaned out loud.

"Oh, no. Not again?" I let out.

Raeis looked frightfully puzzled and, while I figured this one, it suddenly dawned on me that not so much as a single paid protector of my person had put in an appearance, while an enormous chap with a very sharp machete had calmly walked in on me out of the night and was now staring fixedly at a tabletop covered with top-secret matter. I really yelled then; and there was a great running. Everybody appeared; from the Head Girl to the Chief of the Guard. Only Jimmy and the

night guard were absent. They all looked amazed.

"Where did *this* come from?" I inquired, when silence had fallen upon the assembled community, indicating Raeis. The real shocker was, that nobody knew. What is more, the guard for the night was not present. I looked at Raeis and then at the machete.

"You didn't, did you?" I asked. And this time he really laughed.

"No," he said, "but, look-you, mon: he no fit for catch Carib-Man."

(To get this small facet of that memorable evening out of the way, I should interject here that said guard was duly located in a very cramped position, trussed up like a small fowl, but quite unharmed. The Black Caribs have their own mysterious ways of doing things, which fall under the general heading, "Jokes, Carib; Whites, for use on.") But this was no joke. Raeis was not laughing any more. He positively glared around, and slapped his machete on the table. Then it was my turn. I grabbed Raeis and propelled him into my office. I left the door wide open.

"Now, what is all this about?" I demanded as soon as we were out of earshot.

Raeis remained standing and looking half scared and half bellicose. I repeated my question with no better results. His eyes were swivelling about from left to right like a cornered animal. I began to get real angry and jumped him with, "Look-you! I promised not to give you away once before, and I never did—did I? I don't have to go over all that again. If I let you down, you come tell me; and, if you find it be true, you use your machete; I'll use my—" and I sort of patted an automatic lovingly. That seemed to straighten him out a bit but the poor guy was thinking furiously; and that, of course, hurts. He was obviously in a new predicament and his pride was shattered because he had got himself into it. The Black Caribs are appallingly proud and in their estimation can never be wrong. Actually, they seldom are, but poor Raeis had hit a new one to him. I had to start prying open those titanic black doors that are slapped shut shortly after birth all around the soul of every baby Carib.

"If I'd known that you were coming, I'd have—" I started, but the stupidity of that cliche got me down, so I ended by asking, "Why the hell didn't you ask to see me?" There was a long pause. Then Raeis looked me straight in the eye for the first time.

"If anybody know I come here, talk with you, there'll be fight," he said. Then he went on, "You know mercury come-

go all time. *No* man see."

I stared at him blankly because, you see, I was completely at sea at that moment, having forgotten even the mercury that Jimmy Lee had been mumbling about. So, I jumped to the wrong conclusion. And, at that moment Jimmy Lee sauntered in and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Raeis; his eyes almost closed; and he sat down without saying a word. Raeis rounded on me.

"Who this man?" he asked.

"You know him," I said. "You saw him with me when you went off this cay the last time." And he had.

"Why for he come in here now?" he demanded.

"He's my head-man," I said.

Raeis glared some more and there was another silence. I turned to Jimmy.

"What's all this about?" I asked. "You're supposed to know everything and *you* brought up the whole mercury bit in the first place." And that was when the bullet came through the room, clapboards and all, and shattered a very sexy and rather rude pin-up girl's picture, under glass, that a fellow named Moran had brought from Tangiers and bequeathed to us. It was almost our only exercise in real art. It's destruction annoyed me. I must stress that there were no windows in my inner office!

Jimmy had his revoltingly inefficient pistol, or revolver, or whatever you call the hand-loading things with a revolving chamber that they use in the great south-west of the United States. I grabbed up two Browning automatics, yelled at him to keep Raeis covered, and limped out into the main room, shouting orders right and left. And that was the real signal for the opening of our own private little war.

This "engagement" has not been recorded in the official annals—and I am only too happy that it has not. As a matter of fact, I did a great deal of sweating to see that it was not so recorded, for it was quite a mess. I do not think that, apart possibly from Raeis, there was a single person aboard our cay or lying off it in sundry bottoms who had the faintest clue as to what it was all about once it got started, or who was supposed to shoot at whom. Nonetheless, everybody blazed away for a long time. The first thing that happened—of a strategic nature, that is—was that all the lights went out. This is standard practice in any good engagement but we, being amateurs, had thought of that, and had an alternate power source, run on kerosene from an insulated underground tank. What is more, this lit up a mass of really terrifying bright floodlights pointing outwards all around the island. Thus, my

first objective was this power plant.

I made it at the same moment that somebody larger than I did. I did not wait to ask who it was but let him have it below the knees in a particular way learned elsewhere. "He" went down groaning. (He turned out subsequently to have been the cook; a man absolutely devoid of initiative or ability of any kind up till that day—or thereafter. He never forgave me.) Leaving him in the inky blackness, I got into the little blockhouse-like building and threw a switch. Nothing happened.

I don't understand the first thing about any mechanical, let alone electrical devices, so it was, I realized, quite useless fiddling with it, and especially in the dark. Also, it was, I knew, potentially very dangerous, so I charged out, though remembering to lock the door again, and headed for the heaviest gunfire. This was, at that stage, still of the staccato, light-arm variety. However, as I approached it cautiously—for I was, as I have said, limping badly and using a stick—there was the most terrific explosion.

I stopped dead, convinced that an ammo dump had gone up, though none of ours seemed to be of sufficient size. Then there came another shattering wallop and something whizzed overhead. I hit the ground but as much from fright as from any training and an enormous light brightened the lower sky directly ahead and right over the locals' bathing and canoe-launching beach. Everything was clear as mid-day. And what should I see between the palm trunks but a positively enormous boat, close in-shore, but with sails cranking aloft. Then there came another couple of monumental explosions and it dawned on me that Sergeant George Abercrombie and his gallant Jamaican militia who manned our defensive set-up had got into action. What is more, they were having a whale of a time at our end of the island, while those at the farther end were apparently not going to be outdone, for they were blazing away with a carefree disregard for regulations (and ammo conservation). Somehow they had got their guns swivelled around and were shooting over us, or just plain at us. Even more marvellous, they too, although literally miles awav, seemed to be concentrating on this mystery ship lying off our southern beach; and some of them were not doing too badly. either, though none of them had ever fired a gun in anger in their lives before. It was quite an impressive sight as I hobbled out on to the beach.

There, the first person I ran into was Jimmy. He was running about very actively for him, and

even shouting. I grabbed him and demanded his attention. "What is going on?" I yelled above the din, which was mounting steadily.

"Raider," he yelled into my ear.

"Where's Raeis?" I yelled back.

"Went out with the lights," he shouted.

I began to swear very loudly and this, surprisingly, coincided with a sudden cessation of gunfire round about. People began to assemble around me.

"What are you shooting at?" I shouted.

"The enemy," they all yelled back in chorus, and a few chaps at the back let off a volley. It was really all very silly. But just then a splendidly aimed shot from the other end of the cay came careening along straight through the palms' heads and went on out through the mizzen of the big boat, which had cut her anchor and was veering off for the gap in the reef. And at that moment, as if on cue, the whole cay itself lit up like a bloody Xmas tree. For some reason, the auxiliary power plant had come on, and the great ship leapt into view like a black-and-white movie shot in a studio.

This unexpected brilliance had a most desirable effect. I never knew if it was panic or the blinding lights, but the chap in charge of the wheel of said vessel, instead of either heading out to sea or hitting the reef, executed a very neat turn that I never would have believed such an enormous hull could make in such a confined space, and thus he got his ship broadside on to the beach inside the reef. Then, a great commotion broke out under the palms behind us, and two shots rang out, and everybody charged off landward. I followed, hobbling at my best speed up the soft sand.

There was a fairly substantially built frame house about two hundred feet in among the massed coconut palms which the forty or so local people used as a sort of community centre and bachelor quarters. It was in darkness but for one or two kerosene lamps since it was not connected with our auxiliary power plant. A great hubbub was issuing from it. As I tottered in last, this died down somewhat, apart from the fact that everybody was talking at once. Among these Jimmy's voice transcended all. What is more, he was jabbering in German. Everybody on the island, apart from the Jamaican contingent, seemed to be present, and they were massed in what was actually the basement or rather the ground level under the main floor, for the house was built on piles and this ground floor had been walled in with heavy mahogany

planks such as are often found floating about that sea, having fallen or been washed off the decks of the lumber ships. The sole entrance was, luckily as it turned out, on the landward side.

When I forced my way through the crowd a most surprising sight was disclosed in the uncertain light of the bush-lamps. The Chief Guard and an enormous black man, not unlike Raeis but wearing denim shirt and pants and a black panama hat, had hold of a singularly unprepossessing-looking white man with baleful pale eyes contrasting horribly with his sunburned skin. He was a white man all right, and not, I immediately surmised, an islander. Jimmy held a gun on him. I waved my stick and shouted for silence and as the hubbub died down, naturally demanded an explanation. Jimmy answered me over his shoulder.

"We've caught a fish," was what he said.

"So I see, but what species might it be?" I inquired.

"The genuine article. May I introduce Herr Hans Oheim, alias Senor Alonzo Ibarra, citizen of Colombia, late merchant of Providencia Island; holding, if I am correct, the rank of Commandant in the German Navy. A blue-eyed little boy, as you will perceive."

"And who's our tall pal?" I asked, indicating the huge black gentleman holding the said "fish" on the left side and grinning broadly.

"May I introduce——" Jimmy started to say, and then it happened.

I don't quite know how to describe just what *did* happen, except to say that it could be matched only by a V-2 going off a block away. It was more of a "smack" than a "bang" and it knocked us all flat, and temporarily deafened us, during which brief period there was, however, nothing to hear, for there was, I was told later by those farther away, a deadly silence. Then there came an increasing crescendo of crashes, the house above us shook as if being smashed apart—which in point of fact it was—and things started landing all around with dull thuds on the sand. Luckily the good old bushlamps had not gone out—it take more than a hurricane to extinguish that marvellous invention; and, as we started picking ourselves up, I saw the black man and Jimmy make simultaneous dives for our blue-eyed friend who was crawling for the door. He was bleeding like a stuck pig, due, it transpired later, to the fact that the explosion had caused Jimmy to pull the trigger on his gun by reflex, so hitting the fellow in the stomach. Then, there came a final crash and the whole house

gave a lurch to starboard. Everybody stampeded for the exit, going right over Jimmy, the tall man, and their prize. And we were not a moment too soon, for no sooner had be hauled the latter out of harm's way, than the whole thing went crashing to the ground in one piece, but flattening like a carton run over by a truck.

Some of the defence lights were still on, but those about us were out, and there was a lot of confusion until a flame licked up from the house and rapidly took hold. The collapse had been one thing the bushlamps could not withstand, so that very shortly we had both a merry blaze and plenty of light. The islanders started trying to pull stuff out of the wreck, especially their tackle and boat gear which had been kept in the basement and which had been left for the most part intact when the house went over on its tall piles. I immediately ordered all my gang to pitch in and help and then to bring everybody to H.Q., whither I started to head. However, the Chief Guard advised against this, saying firmly, "There's another one loose, sir, and he's armed. There may be more ashore and there's a whole crew on board the boat, sir."

"No, dere is not, mon," came a booming and well-known voice from out of the shadows. It was Raeis. "Whole boat gone. Maybe some man swim but I no see," he added.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Raeis just pointed seaward and, shading my eyes from the flames, I peered through the palm trees which I suddenly realized were almost all now leafless. And sure enough, the great ship had vanished and the "white-water" inside the reef looked very funny: "My God," I murmured, comprehension slowly dawning.

So we left the guards and Jimmy in charge of salvage and prisoners and I led the balance of my crew off to the beach.

When I say the ship had gone, I am not being wholly accurate. Gone down would be a better word, for despite the terrific force of the explosion which had taken place in her guts, the tough old girl must have come apart about the water line so that her whole deck, and what super-structure she had, had gone up in one piece and come down again almost intact, and was not exactly at sea level. When her bottom half went, her masts had, of course, been unstepped and literally blown out so that they now floated around her attached by their rig, like three vast, nursing whales. The water as far as you could see, the whole beach, and everywhere among the palm trees was littered with debris of all kinds from huge hunks of tim-

ber to bits of canvas. Somehow the mess looked far more awful than a bombed town or even a battlefield, due, I suppose, to the contrast between this debris and the pure white sand that was now picking up a little light from a rising moon. Raeis was by my side.

"What happened?" I asked simply.

He thought a minute, as was his wont, and then said, "One your big gun hit boat, ballast go up—explode," he added for emphasis.

"The ballast went up? You mean the cargo, don't you?"

"No. Cargo only cloth. Torpedos were ballast. Ballast inside. Before was stones with plenty sulphur to kill rats."

"Torpedos!"

"Yes. That what I come try tell you. Plenty oil too; gun; and bad mon."

"What was the name of that boat?" I asked, and I got the enlightening reply—the *Mercury!* All I could say was, "Good Lord!" Then I yelled for the head guard. He came running.

"George," I said, ignoring formalities when he arrived at the double, "stop your men shooting, for the love of mike" (not that any had been since the explosion), "and then start looking for bodies. Are any of our people dead?" I added.

"I don't think so, sir, but some pretty bad cut."

"Damn!" I spluttered, our best medical chappie naturally being among those away reporting. "Well, search them out first and get them to H.Q.; then round up everybody, stick the kids with their mothers in the back office, issue arms, and start searching. Raeis!" I shouted to his departing back, "were you on that boat?"

"Yes," he said.

This brought me up sharp because I had not considered this possibility before, having presumed that he had arrived on his own canoe. So all I asked was, "Why?"

"I work for Captain."

"Since when did Carib-man start working on big boats?" I inquired.

"All crew Carib-man except them white man," he told me.

"What white man?"

"Same like you catch up there," he answered, jerking his thumb landward.

"Come here, Raeis," I commanded. "Now, tell me: how many Carib-man, how many white man, and how many other man on that boat?"

Raeis thought a long time, then he answered me carefully, "All man twenty-one. Carib fifteen man; white man, five; one other man; Caiman Island man."

"Who was the Captain?"

"That *black* man; hold white man up there," he spat. And, it was obvious that he implied con-

tempt, though the fellow in the blue denims could have been his brother.

"What sort man he be?" I asked.

"He the Caiman-man," Raeis told me.

I pondered this one. A Caiman Islander in charge of a German raider seemed most unlikely. Caiman Islanders were more pro-ally than the Americans and more British than the Barbadians, who in turn beat the British themselves at flag-waving. I didn't believe it, and said so.

"He Caiman-man," Raeis insisted. "But them white man run ship; always keep guns. He sail ship; we work."

I turned to the head guard. "Well, we've got four white men and fourteen Caribs to account for; and we've got to find them. Tell everybody to challenge anybody or anything they see moving but don't shoot till they identify themselves. I will *not* have any Caribs shot or wounded; but, above all, get me those white men, dead or alive. Now get!" Sergeant George Abercrombie saluted and I'll swear it made the loose sand vibrate. Grabbing Raeis again, I set off for H.Q.

There I found quite a scene. Somebody had got the main lights going again and the place looked like an amusement park. All the dozen kids were bawling and they were all in the main, not in the back office as ordered. Jimmy was there with the big Caiman Islander. The "captive" was now a corpse and stretched out on a settee. Some of our male islanders were present, and I shooed them out at once under a guard—the one who had been trussed up by Raeis—and told them to get to work hunting. They did not seem to like the suggestion at all. Then I beckoned Jimmy into my office. He looked very serious.

"Now, Jimmy," I opened up. "will you kindly start explaining?"

"Well," he said, and he was obviously for once a bit crestfallen, "one of my friends told me—" That got me very annoyed, so I interrupted.

"One of your precious Wongs, I suppose. Now you shut up and listen to me. Why didn't you tell me that you were talking about the schooner *Mercury* instead of the metal mercury? No, I said shut up. Don't you realize, you ass, that you may have endangered the lives of everybody aboard this cay, and God knows what else besides? Your duty is to find out what is going on and report to me, not go playing games with Caribs and Germans."

"I didn't do that, sir," he said simply; and I'd never even suggested that he call me "sir" in my life. It startled me. Then he

added, "I'm very sorry. It was a silly joke about the *Mercury*."

"Well, what did you do?" I asked, passing that remark up for the nonce.

"It was like this," he began, "Mr. Wong told me that there was a big boat that loaded all the unused torpedoes off subs when they were out of fuel or had to go back to Germany, and then cruised around till told to meet another sub and hand them over. We've been weeks trying to find out what this boat was and then only last week we found out that she was the *Mercury*. Also, Mr. Wong found out that she had been more or less high-jacked by a gang of Germans from Providence Island who had taken Spanish names and Colombian nationality after the first world war, married Latin-American wives, and raised families there. The same boys who were running the radio station there last year. And right at the same time one of Mr. Wong's friends told me that she was headed this way but he did not know why. That was yesterday. Then he called me again and said that it didn't seem right because she was not armed and they could have sent a dozen subs and probably knew our patrol boat was away." He dried up.

"Don't you know *any more*?" I pleaded.

"I am afraid I don't," he said. "But I did alert the guard," he added.

"And since when have you been giving the orders around here," I rapped.

"I wasn't," he answered, "but you are so darned busy and I didn't want to start a great shindig for nothing; besides, what are they for? But that's not the point. The damned thing is, she slipped in without my detecting her." And, Jimmy looked real gloomy.

"I don't understand," I said, still piqued to say the least.

"Look, sir," he said. "I've got a pretty good set-up here and it ought to be able to spot an iron nail on a floating log within a reasonable distance, but the *Mercury* was inside the reef before I even knew it. Thank God some of the fellows were down on the beach."

"Ah!" I came back, "I think I have a clue. Get me that captain." The huge man was promptly marched in, looking very worried.

I should interject here that the *Mercury* was damned nearly a full-rigged ship; painted a sinister dull black, with three hunky masts and a loat of very dirty but immensely heavy canvas. She had had a plethora of names over her long life—mostly the first names of the sons or daughters of her equally numerous owners. But this is not to be interpreted as meaning that she

was a "bad boat"; quite the contrary, she had not only never given any trouble in her life but had managed, almost alone, to survive the turn-over to power in the Caribbean. She was of some three hundred tons burthen and never had an engine in her; what is more, she had always plied her trade in and out of the worst collection of reefs and coastal channels in the world—all under lone sail.

At the time of which I write, the *Mercury* was officially owned by two Colombians, but nobody seemed able to tell me who her current master was. I had heard of the *Mercury* for some years, but our paths had never crossed, since she had no set runs but just traded about all over the place, picking up local produce and deck passengers and sometimes dumping both off at points to which they were not consigned; if you get what I mean. During prohibition she made several people large fortunes, and she was constantly being taken into custody by the U. S. Feds, and might well have been ordered destroyed, but she was such a beautiful boat and such a grand old lady that somehow she always got resold and given a new lease on life. The trouble with her, from the Feds' point of view was that, not using power, she could and did slip in and out of any kind of patrol and, being of comparatively shallow draft and bald-headed, she used to poke into bayous in mangrove and other forested coastal areas and virtually disappear. And she had a really phenomenal carrying capacity.

As soon as the captain was seated and the amenities were over, I closed the door and put my first question. This was:

"What is your name, please?"

"Nicholas Alberts, of Grand Caiman. I am British," he replied.

"Good," I said. "Now, there are some points here that I want cleared up at once, Mr. Alberts. You were master of the *Mercury*?

"Yes, sir."

"I shall ask you more details about that later, but I would like to know now—and immediately—how come you were in command of an enemy raider. Also, why did you come here, and what happened when you did?"

The man then explained that he had been employed to run the *Mercury* just before the war started, and from long distance; and, having sailed in her before, he had accepted, though he did not know the owners. He had taken her over in La Guira, Venezuela, and had then traded as usual all over the Caribbean. Then he had been ordered to Providence Island, a dependency of Colombia, but far north off

the coast of Nicaragua, and had there loaded some copra and these five white men, who had asked passage to the mainland in the normal way. (All were old residents of the island with businesses there; all had respectable Spanish names, spoke Spanish, and had families; but all were actually German-born and had settled there in the early twenties,) The moment they were out of sight of land, these men had taken over the ship at the point of the gun. Then they had altered course to an uninhabited spot on the Nicaraguan coast and tossed all members of the crew but himself ashore, moved the ship a few miles up the coast to a Carib village; gone ashore and come back with the Caribs; upped sail and started out. That had been no less than six months ago. During this time they had made only two ports, where the local officials were already well bribed in advance. Otherwise, they had been cruising from cay to cay, picking up torpedoes, fresh vegetables, small-arms ammunition and cases of other items, the contents of which the captain never did know, and delivering them to German subs. The Caribs were just not interested—they never are. Then he had been ordered to our cay.

"But why?" I asked. "Surely a sub could have done a much better job. They could have layed-to off the reef and landed anywhere up the cap."

The captain pondered this and looked even more crestfallen. Then he said quietly, "I don't understand German, but I do Spanish, and they sometimes spoke in Spanish. I'm afraid, sir, they had some people here who were helping them, and I think it was the Caribs who told them everything that went on here as we were always picking up Carib canoes at sea and in cays (meaning in the lagoons inside many cays). I'm afraid, sir, you have some bad man and I don't like to say so, but I think it's my own people." And he looked even worse.

"What do you mean by that, Captain?" I asked. "We don't have any Caiman islanders here."

"Yes, you do sir, and I'm afraid one of them is my brother. He is not a good fellow, sir. He went to Jamaica and joined the Defence Force and he was always talking like a Jamaican about throwing out the British and joining America. He was in school in America. Then the Americans built the base in Jamaica, and he got in trouble with them and started saying the Germans were right all along. He was sent here in your guard."

I thought hard for a moment since I knew the names of all of the small unit we had to protect our ostensible "weather station," but there was no one by the

name of Alberts that I knew of. I was just about to call Sergeant Abercrombie when the captain interrupted my thoughts by saying, "He's the one Raeis tied up, sir."

"But that's George Young," I replied.

"That's right," said the captain. "He's my half-brother; no relation, same father," he added, using a quaint but common local descriptive phrase.

"Oh, I see," I said. "No love lost between you two, heh?"

"No, sir, he's a very bad man. My father kicked him off Grand Caiman."

"Oh, I see. But this doesn't explain why they used the *Mercury* instead of a sub to try and take us over."

"I think it does," Jimmy put in. "What could a bunch of German ratings or even intelligence men do with this station? Much better take over quietly, install the fellows from Providencia; disarm the guard or shoot them and us, knowing our boat's away with most of the gang, scuttle the *Mercury* or, darn it, just keep her to patrol or get away in, or put a couple of officers off a sub to run her, and it would be a long time before anybody really got on to the fact that there was something wrong here. If a sub had been spotted they would have a fight on their hands and that we'd send out her whereabouts within seconds; but the *Mercury* might just come in quietly without raising the suspicion of either the locals or the guard—especially in view of our friend, George Young," he added.

"I think that's right, sir," the captain said.

"Well, what happened when you got here?" I asked.

"They told me to come right in through the reef and then let her drift. We came in by the upper channel two miles from the beach. They put two of their men in a small skiff and they went ashore. Then they told me to up the staysail and drift her down to the beach, using poles to keep her off the reef on the larboard and the shallows on t'other. We made it down in about an hour. One man stood beside me with a gun in my back all the time, and another of them white men hit a Carib real hard when he started talking."

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"Well, sir, when we had let the hook down, real quiet, they got two machine-guns from somewhere and clamped them on the gunwhale. They had the Caribs running all over, getting boxes up from below. They was all busy, I just slipped away and went over the side down the hawser and struck out for shore. I hold my hat in my teeth and go round the long way," he added.

"And what did you do then?" I inquired.

"I went to the beach house. I know some of these people real good, and I told them quick what goes on. There was a policeman from Jamaica there and I know him—he marry one of my sister from the Island—I tell him about my brother, and he take his gun—then there is a shot up here at this house—that policeman, his name Johnny, run this way and start shooting—then they start shooting from the ship—and then . . ."

"And then, what?" I asked.

"This Johnny call out, and I'm runnin' to him——and he says come on. Then the lights all go out but there's a bushlamp in the kitchen and I run in and a girl say there's a fight in the house, so I run in and this gentleman (and he indicated Jimmy) is holdin' one of them white man and this Raeis you call him —though we call him Allie—is holding a flash. 'Help hold him, he says, and when I grab him and the flash, Allie runs out. Then the Mister here and I get a grip on the man and haul him down to the house on the beach where there's plenty man to hold him. Then you come."

"Oh! I see," I interjected. "What's your story, Jimmy?"

"Just as he says," Jimmy told me. "When the lights went out I made a dive for my room and, sure enough, there was this fellow with a flash going to work on my special stuff. I hit him real hard and lost my gun. Then the Captain here came running but Raeis was right behind me, grabbed the gun and hit the fellow fit to crack his skull. Then we hauled him off to the beach, and he came-to just before you got here."

"I see," I said, but then a thought struck me, and I bawled for Sergeant Abercrombie, who appeared, already beginning to salute.

"Sergeant," I rapped, "did anybody find George Young, who was supposed to be on guard outside this evening?"

"Yes, sir," and he saluted again.

"Where is he?"

"Under arrest, sir."

"Very good, Sergeant. So you found out, too?"

Sergeant Abercrombie looked puzzled. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, "I don't understand. I arrested him for *de-re-liction* of duty," and he snapped out this phrase like the good policeman he had once been.

"Oh!" I could not help letting out. "Of course. Very good," I repeated lamely. Then added hastily. "Where is he now?"

"In the guardhouse, sir."

"Very good indeed," I announced. "Bring him in at once."

And a short time later, a far from cocky Corporal Young was marched in, handcuffed. He

glared at his half-brother, who literally spat at him.

"Now," I began almost pompously, "you have some explaining to do." I had expected either a bellicose breast-beating tirade such as is the stock in trade of cornered Jamaicans, or a whimpering plea of total innocence and incomprehension; but, instead, and to my utter surprise, the fellow drew himself to attention and facing his brother as much as me went into a rapid-fire statement like a police report. What he said was this:

He was patrolling the garden in the shadows in accordance with orders, and carrying only side-arms as per orders. On passing between two bushes a hand had closed over his mouth and an arm like a vice had encircled him, and before he knew it, a wad of cotton-waste was stuffed into his mouth and his hands were lashed to his sides. Then his assailant pushed him to his knees and trussed his legs to his body and just rolled him under a bush. He immediately began to struggle and in trying to roll over found that his gun was still at his hip. He could not roll out of the tangle and so worked his arms around till he could draw the gun, for his hands were free though his wrists were firmly bound behind his back. Finally, he got the gun out and, rolling over, tried to aim a shot at the roof of the house. As he did so, a man whom he thought must have been his assailant appeared and ran for the veranda. Then the lights went out. That was all; except that he reported that, when the emergency lights came on, he had drawn the attention of another guard by firing another shot. His colleague untied him and took him to Sergeant Abercrombie who – he seemed piqued to have to say– promptly arrested him, handcuffed him, and locked him in the guardhouse. Corporal Young gave the impression of being a very misused man. We all looked at each other when he stopped talking, and Jimmy's mouth opened.

Here we had an alleged quisling who was virtually claiming to be a bloody hero. The situation was bizarre to say the least. Then there came another interruption—rapid small-arms fire broke out again in the distance.

"I hope," I remarked to Sergeant Abercrombie, "that's not some damned fool taking a pot shot at a Carib."

"No, sir." He snapped, "All Carib man accounted for, sir. Three man dead; four wounded; all other seven man alive. That shooting, sir, must be white man or some damfoolishness, sir. I go look, sir."

"No. You stay here, Sergeant," I ordered, "and tell me how the devil eleven of the Caribs survived that blow-up."

"All Carib man jump the ship and swim ashore, sir; before she blow up, sir. White man on ship shoot three in water, sir. All other come ashore; run for bush, sir."

"Well, that's the best news I've heard tonight," I told him. "So, we have only four Germans to account for."

"I think only one, sir," Sergeant Abercrombie announced. "No man could live on that boat when she go up," and he allowed himself a giggle; then he straightened to attention again. And at that moment, Raeis stomped in toting a large bundle which he dumped unceremoniously on the floor.

"I t'ink you want dis," he said, relapsing into the vernacular. Then he carefully placed a Luger on the table, and walked out. I did not see him again for some months; and how he left the cay I never did find out. He had come to warn me; felt he had failed; so proceeded to "save" me.

Everybody crowded into the main office to look at the bundle and Jimmy turned it over. It was another blond man with nasty pale eyes—now very glassy. He was quite dead; his neck had been snapped; and he wore a singlet with a big blue "MERCURY" emblazoned upon its front. I picked up the Luger. Its chamber was full and there was one in the breech; it had not been fired. I looked out the veranda where Raeis had gone. Nobody will ever understand the ways of the Black Caribs—God bless them. Then another contingent appeared.

This was composed of the islanders and they were a bit excited, stating that they had cornered a white man, ordered him to raise his hands and be taken, but he had run into the shadows and they had fired at him and thought they had hit him because they had heard him cry out. Failing to find him or any blood they had decided to report in for instructions and reinforcements. I pointed to the new corpse. They goggled a bit, but said nothing, not realizing that this was the last of the enemy to be accounted for. One could surmise only one thing. When they had fired, the fellow had run straight into the arms of Raeis who had been stalking him, and Raeis being unarmed, had performed his duty in his own way and according to his own law—and with consummate precision and aplomb. But I did not elaborate on this to the assembled community. Instead, now that our little war was over, I opened a combined Court of Enquiry and Court Martial then and there. And, before dawn broke, this had elicited a lot of most interesting facts.

First off, I questioned our only prisoner—Corporal George

Young, with very able assistance from his half-brother, the captain, who appointed himself prosecutor, and it didn't take long to get the answer. He fully admitted to having been anti-almost-everything, including the British and the Americans, and he also admitted having accepted fairly large sums of money from persons he did not know in various places, and even from a Panamanian on a ship that had called at our cay, all with a view of giving them detailed information about our setup, and especially Jimmy's affairs. But, very strangely, and he could not be shaken in this, he had apparently never done anything in return. He was a bad fellow, all right, but in some strange way, either he just did not dig outright spying, or he was frankly just too scared to try it. He certainly knew nothing of the *Mercury* invading us, and had fired his warning shot in perfectly good faith, though I always believe as much to draw attention to his own plight as to warn us. He did, however, admit to talking too much to the Caribs who visited the cay.

He was detained in custody and finally shipped back to Jamaica as a bad risk, and was a very good little boy for the rest of the war, and then entered island politics—naturally!

The only other thing that came out of the rehash of any import was the intelligence that it had been the cook whom I had felled, and at the apex of the only heroic deed he had probably ever attempted in his life. This puzzled me no end, until the fellow morosely pointed out to me that he had a key to the emergency lighting system and was "officially" our electrician! And he had finally got the lights going. I duly apologized but it did no good at all, and I'm not sure that he didn't try to poison me later; but that's another story.

For the rest, it was a matter of trying to establish a time schedule of the events, and from this, it appeared plain that Corporal Young's shot had preceded a "hold-up" by two of the Germans by seconds, while it must also have been the signal for one of them to throw the lights. After that we were plain lucky, for Sergeant Abercrombie admitted he would never have given the order to fire on the *Mercury*, if they had not started shooting at the Caribs in the water!

This left one thing dangling—and the one to me most infuriating. This was, why had the arrival of the *Mercury* neither been spotted nor reported. My gaze fell upon Jimmy, but the captain came to his aid.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, "but your guards are *not* 'islanders'" (this with some relish), "and it

would have been hard even for them to catch *me* getting in."

He was rather proud about it, for all that he was a highly patriotic citizen and deplored the whole affair. It was his seamanship that was called in question. It *had* been an absolutely black night. Besides, the *Mercury* also had a reputation to maintain in this respect. The combination was just too good for anything short of radar, which we did not have then.

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by Arthur Porges

"Two MEN trying to s l i p through our lines, sir." The big sergeant prodded them forward, none too gently, with the muzzle of his rifle.

"Will you excuse me?" Colonel Rice asked, turning back to his guest. The civilian, a small man, almost dwarfish, with a rubicund face and the attitude of an alert pixie, waved one hand.

"Certainly, Colonel."

The officer's brown eyes, weary and bloodshot in their deep sockets, studied the two captives. One was tall; the other short; but both were gaunt to the point of emaciation. Their clothes were reasonably clean, but worn thin almost to the extent of seeming transparent.

"You two together?" the officer asked.

"Naw," the taller one said. "I ain't never seen him before."

The colonel glanced at the sergeant, raising h i s bushy brows.

"They were caught about two hundred yards apart, sir. Claim to be refugees."

"That's right," the shorter one said. "Had our bellyful o' wind an' rabbit tracks instead o' food."

"Rich man's war, and a poor-

We know very little, actually, about some of the contemporaries of that very lonely man in the White House whose destiny it was to be there during the War between the States. It is possible that this could have happened to one of these men — whose name would be remembered, many generations afterward . . .

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man's fight," the other said. Both avoided looking at each other.

A mortar shell exploded nearby with a deep c-rump, and Colonel Rice swore. His civilian guest winced at the sound of the detonation, and again at the officers language.

"I'm not sure I believe you two," the colonel said, fixing them with his accusing gaze. They met it squarely, although the taller man shuffled his feet.

"It's the truth, sir," the shorter man said. "Hell, I bet you'll have fifty a day from now on."

"If you're only refugees," the officer said, "why try to sneak past my pickets? Why not come in openly?"

"Well," the tall one mumbled, "hit's a lot easier not to answer all these questions, not meanin' no disrespect, sir."

Here the sergeant cleared his throat. The colonel gave him a quick, keen glance.

"Well, sergeant?"

"I don't think they were trying too hard not to get caught, sir."

The civilian suppressed a smile. The sergeant had a heavy brogue; it brought back pleasant memories of the servants at home. He contrasted the luxuries there with the grim austerity of the colonel's headquarters deep in the earth.

"Would you say that's in favor of their story, or against it?"

The sergeant's honest blue eyes clouded.

"I don't know, sir; just thought you ought to be told."

"Were you really trying to get through our lines?" Colonel Rice demanded. "Or hoping to get picked up?"

"Don't know as we cared too much," the shorter prisoner drawled. "One way, no questions; t'other, maybe a feed." He licked his lips, and darted a glance at the remains of the officer's frugal meal.

Another mortar shell boomed, very close this time. The two captives hit the dirt flood at almost the same instant as the colonel and the sergeant. Only the elfish civilian, ignorant of the risk, stayed put. A great cloud of fine dirt filled the room, and one of the beams sagged nearly a foot. The two prisoners sneezed repeatedly as the irritating stuff floated into their nostrils, and the sergeant chimed in with a volume that drowned out all the others.

When the air was clear again, Colonel Rice said, coughing: "Take them away, sergeant; I may want to talk to them again. Meanwhile, see if you can get them some food."

"You ain't gonna let us go?" so don't take it too hard."

When the sergeant had led the taller man asked gloomily.

"Not right away," the officer said; "but you wanted a feed

the pair out, Colonel Rice turned back to his guest. The little man seemed quite abstracted for a moment, then he looked directly at the officer, who realized for the first time that he had never seen such snapping, vital, and knowing eyes in another head.

"May I offer you some advice, Colonel?" the civilian asked.

"About what?" the officer replied cautiously. Bitter experience had taught him the folly of a quick affirmative to that question. On several occasions politicians from Washington had given him detailed instructions on just how to end the war overnight; many of them were just as helpful to Grant. A few tried it on Sherman, too, and were lucky to survive. For all Rice knew, this little squirt, distinguished enough in his own field, might launch into an interminable lecture on firepower or use of the bayonet. Every man, the officer reflected cynically, is an expert on schoolteaching and war.

"Those two men your sergeant brought in." Although the Colonel would never have suspected it, his civilian guest was analyzing his expression, and had made a remarkably accurate guess about his thoughts at the moment.

"Colonel Rice," the little civilian went on hastily, stroking his sideburns, "Edgar Allan Poe wrote somewhere that when you want to know what a man is thinking, just assume the same expression. Now that is really quite profound and accurate. I would bet that right now you're afraid I'm about to offer advice on the conduct of the war, or something related to that, and equally unpalatable."

The officer was surprised, and showed it.

"I didn't mean——" he began apologetically. After all, this was a famous man, and he was still only a colonel.

"I wasn't offended," the civilian said, with smile. "Merely curious as whether I was right. Was I?"

"Yes," was the frank reply. "But I'm sure you'll understand that so many of the people—civilians—who come here, are quick to offer suggestions—very impracticable ones. But," he went on quickly, "you were talking about the two men."

"Yes," his guest said quietly. "But first may I ask how important is their story, or the truth of it?"

"Very important. We're planning an attack—this is in confidence—and the rebs are desperate for detailed information. If these are merely starved noncombatants, I can speed them on their way. If they're confederate spies—you see?"

"They're spies," the little man said in a level voice.

The colonel gaped at him.

"You know them?"

"No. But they were lying about not knowing each other. The fact is, they're related."

"But you just told me you didn't know them!" The officer's voice was full of bewilderment.

"And I don't. But I heard them sneeze. Not just one spasm, but several. Now, believe me, Colonel Rice, it's not a matter familiar to most doctors, but people do sneeze in certain patterns. And those patterns are very often inherited. These two men had the same sequence, a remarkably unusual one. That identity could hardly happen by chance. They are related, and closely; brothers, perhaps; possibly first cousins. Hold them until after your attack; maybe you can even get the truth, now that you know they've been lying."

The colonel was shaking his head in wonder.

"Everybody says you're a great man, and now I can vouch for it." A bugle sounded outside, and he smiled. "Your son is off duty now, and should be here in a few minutes. Please use my tent, Doctor."

"Thank you, Colonel Rice," the little civilian said. And Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes waited alone for his son.

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dear grace

by August Derleth

AMONG FAVORITE American credos is the belief that beauteous, good, and eminently worthy maidens all too often fall for worthless rascals. The flower of American womanhood is thereupon wasted upon the desert of male deceit and lack of honor. Grace Lusk might have been born for no other purpose than to lend weight to this peculiarly American credo, for she was certainly attractive and she was possessed of enough other virtues to excite the admiration of those who knew her.

At nineteen, she was described by the principal of the high school at Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, where she taught near the turn of the century, as a girl who was "wonderfully mature in mental attainments and a splendid teacher, a most loyal friend, a young woman of pure and noble character, a brilliant girl." This paragon was a student of Milwaukee Normal and also of Whitewater Normal; she taught at Milwaukee and Menomonee Falls and finally, Waukesha.

Waukesha was her downfall. Perhaps a critic of education could whip up quite a case for

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August Derleth, who lives in Sauk City, Wisconsin, is perhaps best known to readers of this magazine for his inimitable Solar Pons pastiches. Mr. Derleth, his state's most famous living author aand author of several works in the Lovecraft tradition) is widely recognized as a leading authority on regionalism in American literature. And, as we see from this, on regionalism in murder. . . .

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the assertion that Grace Lusk was the victim of an educational system which required teachers to give instruction in subjects out of their field in order to round out a full schedule. Grace was well versed in chemistry and other sciences, but at Waukesha she was required to teach agriculture. "I had no preparation in this branch," she explained later, "so I had to do considerable studying. When it came down to breeds of cattle, I had nothing on which to base my teaching."

That so prosaic a thing as lack of knowledge about breeds of cattle should have started on her downward path a woman who had behind her extensive reading, a variety of experience, and a protracted trip to Europe seems indeed in retrospect an irony. But agriculture it was, and Grace, for all her thirty-odd years, was somewhat perturbed about it when one evening in the winter of 1913, she attended a dinner party at the home of Mrs. S. B. Mills. Among the guests was Dr. David Roberts, fiftyish, head of the David Roberts Veterinary Company, manufacturer of proprietary preparations for cattle, owner of a noted dairy and breeding farm, and a veterinarian who was known far and wide in southern Wisconsin as a one time purveyor of various nostrums for domestic animals.

It was a fateful coincidence that Grace should meet Dr. Roberts at a time when she was in need of knowledge about domestic animals and when he was in need of someone to help him with the writing of a technical book on veterinarian subjects. Dr. Roberts was willing and eager to help his charming fellow-guest. "I asked him what the characteristics of certain breeds of cattle were," said Grace, remembering their meeting four years later. "He told me. I asked him what breeds were raised in Waukesha County. He told me." Indeed, he was so accommodating as to get one of his books dealing with cattle and promised to supply her with one. "I thanked him," said Grace.

That vaunted intuition presumably so essential an integer in women evidently failed Grace. In a relatively short time their relationship of mutual assistance ripened into something more. Almost before Grace knew it, Dr. Roberts leaned over her desk one day and boldly stole a kiss. Still no red flags went up in Grace's awareness. Dr. Roberts was a smooth article. In no time at all he was telling her his version of his life's story, emphasizing that he was married to a woman he didn't love because she didn't love him. Worse, she misunderstood him.

Grace believed him.

Dear Grace had had no time

for dates when she was younger. She had devoted herself exclusively to books and the cultivation of her mind. Now, teetering on the edge of genteel spinsterhood, the attentions of a man so easy to look at as Dr. Roberts undermined her reason and she fell for the oldest story on the roster of excuses for anti-social human conduct. Poor David was misunderstood by his wife —— how felicitous for both David and Grace that Grace appeared on the scene to understand him!

She fell head over heels in love with the veterinarian, without realizing that Roberts had never loved anyone but himself. For him, Grace was nothing more than a little adventure on the side. After all the preliminary passes had been made, David had no trouble seducing Grace. She was ready for it, in any case. She had been much given to a book on *Love and Marriage,* by Ellen Key, who was a little ahead of her time, and her state of mind had been prepared to accept the fact that many of the virtues which convention held dear were not, in fact, the social or individual benefits they were conceived to be. Grace had been a virgin long enough. David had no idea of what could happen to a woman as a result of the interruption of so long an abstinence.

For over four years the liaison between Grace and Dr. Roberts went on.

They met in various places, traveled and spent passionate weekends together. This happy concupiscence was too good to last, however. David, who was quite a bit older than Grace, ought to have known it couldn't. Perhaps he was so inured to deception that he could deceive even himself. Perhaps it was that Grace in these four years had been a willing student in the amatory life and he felt he could not well do without her. In any case, somewhere about the beginning of the fourth year of their lustful liaison, Grace began to suffer qualms. For all her self-indulgence in this matter, Grace was no dummy. David had declared his love for her time after time, always impassioned and emotional, but he had taken not a single step to shed the encumbrance which prevented her from becoming his wife.

Dr. Roberts, unfortunately, had married a good woman, too, proving that old saw about virtuous women and worthless men twice over. Mrs. Mary Newman Roberts was one of Waukesha's "leading society, club and church women," according to the Waukesha *Freeman.* Grace, however, had another perspective on Mrs. Roberts. In a letter to David's wife late in their liaison, she wrote, "You are the *good*——

moral women (we call them parasites). You have made of your husband a coward and a hyprocrite."

For Grace began to take steps herself to terminate David's "unhappy" bondage to his wife. She began to nag David, who was adept at putting her off. But his little castle of double deception began to shudder and collapse when Grace undertook to write Mary Roberts that her husband was no longer in love with his wife, but with her, Grace Lusk, and she meant to have him. By this time Grace had convinced herself that she had a reason all her own for appropriating Dr. Roberts, "because three years ago, you (Mrs. Roberts) affronted me at a gathering in the Baptist church parlors."

The school, the church, even the Y. M. C. A., all estimable institutions, offered settings for the affair. At the school, Grace Lusk was considered "one of the most able teachers on the staff." She was no stranger to church, either, and Mrs. Roberts was a leader in all doings emanating from the church. David had demonstrated his true feelings for that sterling institution, the Y. M. C. A., by making passes at Grace within its walls. Grace had an office there.

She was desperate by May, 1917.

Immediately after she wrote her first letter to Mrs. Roberts, Grace met David by her arrangement and they went to the Hotel Wisconsin in Milwaukee. It was a hectic meeting, not nearly as amorous as usual. Grace repeated what she had written to David's wife. "Never in my life before have I done anything which even bordered on unconventionality, and this episode has almost killed me." She had arranged the meeting herself because there were "some things I wanted to say to him."

She was distraught. How upset she was was revealed in her baggage. She was carrying a revolver. She meant, she said later, to kill herself if her lover did not do right by her. Doing right, she went on, was putting the facts before Mrs. Roberts and telling her that David no longer loved her, but Grace. Grace had figured it all out, and what it came down to was this: sex just wasn't enough. There were other forms of security; she had a right to them. She did not consider Mrs. Roberts' rights in the matter or in the person of Mr. Roberts, whose calibre was such that it seems incredible two women would actually want him, which is a sad commentary on the supposed intuitive rationality of the fair sex.

At their room in the hotel—Dr. Roberts had registered them; he was an old hand at this sort of thing—Grace told him what the situation was. "I told him

how sincere I had been in my affections, and that I would never have allowed this thing to start, if he had not made me think that, in their home, Mrs. Roberts did not care for him nor he for her. Now, I told him it was beyond our control. I had become hopelessly compromised. My reputation was gone. My life was a nightmare. Because I had always been straightforward, I felt a traitor to my friends because they trusted me, and Mrs. Roberts had been wronged. I told him that if this were a game on his part, and if I had been so simple as not to understand it, I would face the consequences."

Grace's awakening, however belated, had begun. David temporized. He had no intention of awakening his wife to the situation. He said it was impossible to go home, as Grace urged him to do, and tell all to Mary. Grace hied herself to the writing desk in the hotel room and got out the revolver, which she had hidden there. Dr. Roberts came toward her; she ordered him forthwith to step back, and keep back until he placed his hand on the Gideon Bible on the table in the room and swear to tell his wife that night how matters stood. As a liar of some experience, David did not hesitate to lay his hand on the Bible and swear to do as Grace asked.

Afterward, however, when Grace was once more in his arms, he turned on his charms and explained persuasively that, while he would certainly do as she asked, he could not very well tell his wife that night, because she and he were going east on a business trip next day; there were some business affairs which needed attention "before the other trouble could be brought out". Grace magnanimously gave him until June fifteenth to tell his wife, and David said confidently he would tell Mary before that. "I want you to ask her for your freedom," Grace told him. "I want you to arrange this so we can all understand each other."

David understood things up to a point. He understood just where he stood. He knew that he was at the end of the rope with Grace, but what he didn't know was just how to chuck Grace. Besides, Grace could be mighty nice, and he had got sort of used to her. However adept he was at seduction, he had little confidence in the art of successful spurning as he might practise it. He agreed glibly with everything Grace said. "Yes, it's better to be honest about the whole affair," he said. His concept of honesty, however, was a thing apart.

Too late to intercept Grace's letter, David was in quite a quandary. It was something he had not reckoned on. It was too

late to chide Grace for her impulsiveness, once Mary had had her letter. What was it all about? Mrs. Roberts asked blandly. Almost incredibly, Grace and David had been discreet enough to keep suspicion of their affair from the public tongue. Oh, explained David,, Grace was just a young woman who was making a nuisance of herself chasing him.

Unfortunately, Grace had been pretty explicit in her letters. Mrs. Roberts could not have had any doubt as to the status of the relationship. She had not lived with her husband for as long as she had without recognizing instantly that however far the affair had progressed, David had no intention of leaving her. Perhaps Grace had begun to sense this, too, and was caught in the conflict between desire and common sense, knowing that David had made no tangible effort to leave his wife and take steps toward marrying her.

David did his best on that trip east to persuade his wife to believe in the nuisance Grace Lusk had been to him, chasing him all the time, writing and telephoning him, and now this. Whatever his intended goal, the outcome was that Mrs. Roberts determined to see and speak with Grace herself, innocently unaware of the monster David had made out of her in the mind of Grace.

By the time the Robertses got home from the east, both women were champing at the bit. They had not been home for an hour before the doorbell rang. David came to the door and saw Grace there. He stepped outside to speak to her; she was clearly excited, and spoke in a nervous manner. Mrs. Roberts, pondering what the neighbors would think, went to the door and urged them to come inside if they insisted on talking and disputing so loudly. They did not come in. Mrs. Roberts made a second attempt. Still, they did not come in. Instead, David persuaded Grace to let him walk her through the park toward the Mills house where Grace roomed.

When he got back, he and his wife had a little talk. David realized that matters had somehow slipped out of his hands. Mrs. Roberts made it clear that she intended to talk to Grace about the affair to clear the air, "one way or another." Next morning she telephoned Grace and made an appointment at Grace's office in the school building before noon. However, Mrs. Roberts failed to keep the appointment because David forbade her going there. It might be dangerous, he pointed out, belatedly recognizing that Grace's mental state might be described as highly overwrought. At the same time, he cut the

telephone wire at home, to prevent telephone communication.

On Thursday, June twenty-first, Mrs. Roberts left her home shortly after luncheon and walked over to the Mills house. She had learned that Grace was bound for a trip to California, and she meant to settle matters before the teacher got out of reach. The subject of the conversation between the two women was David and the triangle.

Mrs. Roberts was not a devious woman. She opened with a brisk demand that Grace Lusk retire from the affair without delay. The two ladies then indulged in violent claims to the affection of the veterinarian, each claiming that she was the lady of his heart, the apple of his eye, the object of his affections. Naturally, this got them nowhere at all. In the course of the debate, however, Grace became even more tense and overwrought, and Mary got angry enough to forget how prominent she was in church affairs and let fly some of those choice epithets ordinarily considered illegal and in bad taste no matter how many witnesses to their truth can be unearthed.

Mrs. Roberts went to the telephone and called her husband, demanding that he come at once and repeat before them both the statements he had made to her. David had already discovered his wife's absence from home. He had had his business partner, L. D. Blott, watching the house. Now he and Blott drove over to the Mills house. Faced with a showdown, David was in a funk. He couldn't stop the car the first time he came to the house where the two women were going at it hammer and tongs. The fact probably was that the man's spinelessness simply betrayed him; he was scared pink. He had reason enough to be afraid of both women; he had lied himself blue in the face to both.

The second time around the house, the two men heard shots. David stopped the car. He was even then in no hurry at all to find out who had been shot. He dispatched Blott to take a reconnoitering look. Blott went up on the porch and looked through a window. There he saw Mrs. Roberts lying on the floor with blood flowing from her side. Grace was ascending the stairs. Blott, said the *Freeman*, comprehended the scene "in an instant." He went forthwith and told David, and David then telephoned for the chief of police and Dr. A. E. Davies. That he did not telephone from the Mills house seems only too evident. He wouldn't have risked his precious skin even to see whether his wife were still living.

Dr. Davies got to the house in double-quick time and found Mrs. Roberts dead. She had been shot twice. Grace was standing

at the head of the stairs, calm and serene. She made a gesture of despair when the doctor told her Mrs. Roberts was dead. He saw that blood was flowing from Grace's left breast, out of a self-inflicted bullet wound. Grace was still carrying her revolver. He started for the stairs, but Grace warned him back. "If you come up, I'll shoot."

Dr. Davies remained at the foot of the stairs and tried to quiet Grace down. She asked for David. Dr. Davies warned David to keep away. "He did," reported the *Freeman*. One might have known he would.

Grace presently yielded to Dr. Davies' entreaties and dictated a statement. "Dr. Roberts told me again, again and again that he loved me and he cared for no one but me. He said he and his wife never cared for one another but he cared more for me than any one in the world. He promised me he would tell her before June 15. He swore to it on the Bible. I told him if he did not care for me we would drop it all. When he came home through the park last night, I told him he must tell her. I told him the one dishonorable thing we were doing was deceiving her. I called him just before Mrs. Roberts came. He said over the telephone that he had told her. He told her I had been chasing him, and I was the damnedest fool that ever lived. She called me every name. I love him so dearly. Mrs. Roberts called me such awful names." Those five-letter words evidently unnerved poor Grace beyond repair.

She dictated a second statement to a California friend. "I love so dearly. It all came out just as you said. You are the only one I told about this. Tell my daddy to forgive me." She asked Dr. Davies where her heart was. He told her. She retired promptly to her bedroom and shot herself a second time. She missed again. When she came to, she said, "That was the most unfortunate miss I ever made." On a stretcher, on the way out of the house, Grace added, "I am so strange. I love him still." "Strange" was hardly the word for it.

Just the same, Grace evidently realized at long last that David was not to be depended upon. She asked to see him, but he did not come. She made no attempt to burn sheaves of letters from David, letters which, in the immemorial custom of lovers, teemed with indiscretions; these were promptly taken in charge by District Attorney Maurice Tullar. Four days later, while she was still recuperating in the hospital, she gave a special agent from the Department of Justice a two-hour interview about the various assignations she and David had had as "Rob't Davis and wife" in hotels in Chicago,

Peoria, and elsewhere. Robert Davis, it will be noted, is almost an exact reversal of David Roberts, testifying once again to the man's egregious conceit.

Among the effects Grace left at the Mills house were two fragments of letters. One, without a head, read: "I have spoiled it all. I loved him so. God forgive me. This is the work of a man who said he loved me." The other was addressed to Mrs. Roberts; quite conceivably it duplicated the letter sent from Milwaukee, which Grace supposed David had intercepted.

"It has been a desire with me for a long time to tell you frankly about the state of affairs between Dr. Roberts and myself. I have asked him repeatedly to tell you the whole story, but you seem to have him terrorized to a pitiful degree. If I were to blame you for one thing, it would be for that. You must have known for many years that there did not exist between your husband and yourself the honest confidence that is essential in the higher state of marriage.

"You must have known for a long time that your husband's affections had passed from you; that he cared for someone else. That is sufficient annulment of any marriage vow that ever was given.

"That is the way you respectable folk——good, moral women ——do things in order to keep your reputation and live lives of ease.

"In the eternal triangle our souls require for their solution the elimination of one character. The two who should remain are the two whose affection is mutual. There is no use in my telling you the details of our 'case'. I am sorry that it ever started. It has wrecked my life and hurt those who are dear to me. Will you some time read Ellen Key on *Love and Marriage?*"

Waukesha was shocked to the core. A week after the crime the *Freeman's* editorialist, Frank P. Haight, held that "In all its history, Waukesha has never been so completely s h o c k e d by tragedy." He waxed eloquent. "The element that doubly emphasized the tragic episode was the fact that a most estimable woman met her death in an effort to correct a situation up to the recognized standard of public morals. Her endeavor, though involving a personal interest, was fundamentally an endeavor to uphold and insist upon Waukesha's moral standards being maintained. Her effort was in behalf of the whole public.

"The victim was a sweet and gentle woman. Her life here has been devoted to the advancement of civic betterments. She was a pillar of her church, an active and enthusiastic suffragist, a worker for social betterment in the city——a champion of tem-

perance, good order and increased happiness among our people. For these virtues she boldly proclaimed; not only proclaimed but actively labored for them.

"Her reward was to be a victim of a bullet fired by one of a domestic triangle who professed to rebel against the conventions and morals of the community. Death was for the moralist; meted out by the lawless. That, indeed, was tragedy!"

Dr. David Roberts, he of the seductive line and horse pills, escaped mention. And there was never a woman born, however sweet, gentle, and temperate, pillar of the church or no, who found it impossible to call another woman a bitch and a whore if the circumstances seemed to warrant it. Dear Grace's disillusionment ought by this time to have been complete. David was playing an all too familiar tune——he had been the pursued male, he had hardly known which way to turn, he was made of mortal flesh and succumbed to repeated temptation. Over four years of it. As for the victim, eager to set things to right according to what the *Freeman* called "Waukesha's moral standards", it was strange that she had waited so long to do it; the word leaked out that she had known of the situation for at least a year previous to her death.

By the time Grace Lusk finally went on trial, charged with murder in the first degree, everything that could be known about her had been revealed. There was her popularity as a teacher, for instance. She was informed and her students loved her. True, she had had a disconcerting habit of talking about such subjects as the rights of soul-mates over wives, but no one had suspected that she was talking about her own case. She was now almost forty years old; she had been teaching for twenty-two years, except for research in Europe. Her attachment for a smooth operator like Dr. David Roberts was laid in part to her anxiety at the approach of middle-age without amatory experience. She lacked the knowledge of men which might have told her how weak a vessel David was.

Some feeling for Grace developed and grew.

There were those who remembered how she suffered from migraine, how neurotic she was, how unstable. Her defense, ably conducted by Senator Henry Lockney and James M. Clancy, left no stone unturned to show that there might be some reason to believe Grace had been temporarily off balance at the time she had shot Mrs. Roberts. They brought in Grace's teachers——A. H. Sholts of Oregon, who testified that Grace had been an "exceptionally bright girl and

devoted much time to study"; Prof. W. H. Cheever, vice-president of Milwaukee Normal, who "recalled that on one occasion he told her that she worked too hard."

They offered an array of witnesses to Grace's migraine and neuritis, and they even persuaded Dr. T. W. Evans of Madison, a neighbor of the Lusks when they lived in Stoughton, to testify that old Dr. A. P. Lusk, who was sitting at Grace's side during the ordeal, "had queer habits, that even in the winter he sometimes appeared to brush flies from his face when there were no flies." To this Dr. Herbert Hannan of Oregon, a student of dentistry under Dr. Lusk, added "the doctor often would place his hat on a hook and then talk to it. He carried three pins in his pocketbook, that sometimes while treating a patient he would rush from the room, open the purse, place the pins in a row and talk to them."

Dr. Lusk sat through all this without blinking an eye. Probably he had a good long talk with his pins after it was all over, but for the moment he sat stoutly at his daughter's side, knowing she was a wronged woman. He stood for being called "off" and he listened with equanimity to details of his aberrations, not the least of them being the many times he returned to his office to make certain that he had locked the door. Luckily for the prosecution, there were no psychiatrists present; they would have nailed this one at once as a compulsion neurosis, and even if he hadn't gone back, they'd have insisted on his having at least an anxiety neurosis. Grace might have been sufficiently impressed to herself enter a field already overcrowded with neurotics.

Judge Martin L. Lueck presided. He was a man of sufficient experience and adequate wisdom to look past the arguments of both prosecution and defense. The case, as far as the bench was concerned, was relatively simple. He saw beyond Grace and got a good square look at Dr. David Roberts. Besides, he read through more of the letters Roberts denied he had written than were offered in court. From his point of view, the case stank to high heaven with a stench emanating directly from Dr. David Roberts.

In the middle of the case, Judge Lueck dispatched the jury to the jury room, and proceeded to call the attention of the attorneys in the case to the apparent necessity of prosecuting Roberts on a criminal charge of having had illicit relations with the defendant, both in Wisconsin and Illinois. Senator Lockney had forced an admission from Roberts, who had at first cagily refused to answer on the

ground that he might incriminate himself. Judge Lueck recognized that the Wisconsin statutes of limitations might prevent prosecutions of Roberts in Wisconsin, but there was a slight chance that Cook County in Illinois might bring an action against Roberts. Roberts himself was considerably chastened by this time, and admitted that every time he went out with Grace there had been "criminal actions."

Thereafter the trial resumed. Prosecutor W. D. Corrigan asked for a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree. He called the whole case "a simple A. B. C. proposition". He scored Dr. Roberts and their affair. "This was not a romantic love affair. It was marked by plain vulgarity on both sides, and it makes a nightmare of it to call it 'love'. The stories of the two are about the same. One, the woman, is accomplished in the dramatic art. The other is steely and cold-blooded. He appeared before you today in a steel cask." Defense Counsel Clancy blamed it all on Roberts. "That first kiss upon her lips in the Y. M. C. A. was the fatal thrust that ended the life of his wife," he declared. "Grace Lusk never believed that she was filling an ignoble role. She thought that she was the only woman Dr. Roberts loved."

Judge Lueck made a clear and concise charge to the jury, finishing late in the afternoon of May twenty-ninth, when the trial was ending its second week. The jury was out four hours. In mid-evening they returned with a verdict of guilty of murder in the second degree. Grace sprang from her seat and got hold of Prosecutor D. S. Tullar's neck, with the evident intention of choking him. She was separated from him with difficulty and carried screaming from the courtroom. Thereafter she collapsed and remained in a mental fog for days afterward.

On June eighteenth, Judge Lueck passed sentence on Grace Lusk, who had come out of her mental fog by this time——not, however, without having been examined by three alienists who found her sane. Right to the end, Judge Lueck was consistent. "I want to say that I have one regret, a sincere regret, that I cannot mete out to Dr. Roberts the punishment I think he ought to have. So far as it is in my power he will get as much as the law will give him. . . . Some circumstances in this case cast greater blame on Dr. Roberts than upon you. Still, you had no right to yield. You were experienced in the world; you had a good education."

Sad to relate, all the education in the world could not have throttled Grace's instinctive reactions. Nor all the conventions.

The judge held that men of David Roberts' type "should not be encouraged". He gave dear Grace nineteen years at hard labor in the state prison at Waupun, "June 21 of each year to be spent in solitary confinement." Grace promptly swooned.

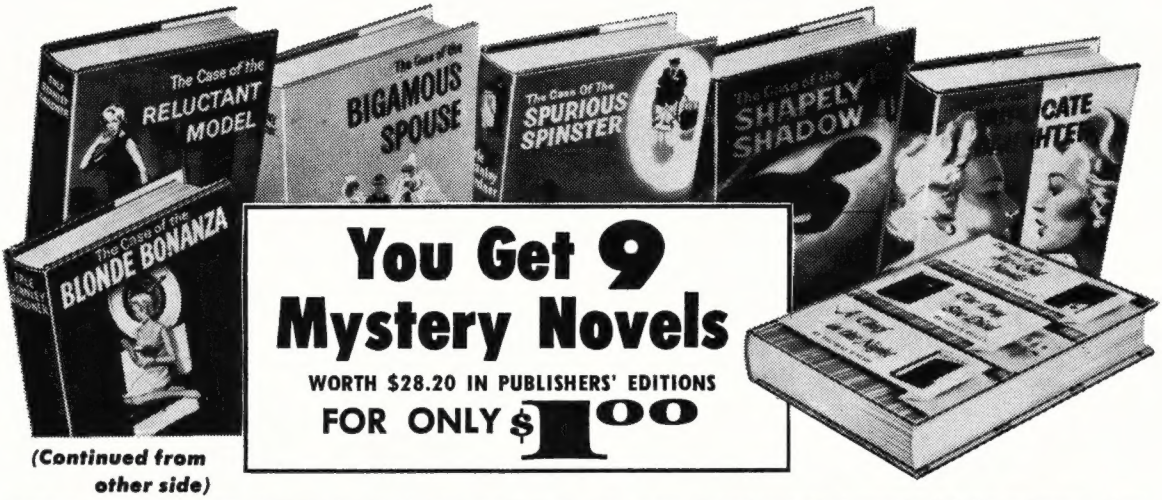
Grace went to Waupun where she took a lively interest in prison conditions. She was paroled in November, 1921, and went almost directly into a sanatorium at Oconomowoc. She was still there when Governor John J. Blaine pardoned her in January, 1923. She had got a goodly number of ideas in prison.

"I am going to devote the remainder of my life to prison reform work," she told a reporter from the Milwaukee *Journal.* "I can perform a great service for the public and for the unfortunate. . . . Prisoners should be educated, they should be given a correct philosophy of life and trained in some trade or profession so that when they get out they will be filled with hope instead of despair, so they will be assets instead of liabilities to society." Soon after the *Atlantic Monthly* carried an article on prisons by one "Alice Thornton", who was widely supposed to be Grace Lusk.

Her ideas of prison reform, however, never came to much. Subsequently, she revealed that she had married a "Mr. Brown", which aroused a great deal of speculation, for no one ever caught a glimpse of him. He was reputed to be an educator, and assumed to be older than Grace. He was also thought to have been a figment of her imagination, though she did buy furniture and have it shipped to a "Mrs. Brown" at an address in the south. Grace described her husband as "a professional man of good standing." She spent her last years gadding about quite a bit, but always unaccompanied. "Mr. Brown" never showed up, even when Grace died in 1930.

As for Dr. David Roberts, the law seemed curiously inadequate. He got off with a short term in Milwaukee's house of correction. He survived it. Moreover, he found another woman to yield to his blandishments. Doubtless he convinced her that he was the innocent victim of dear Grace's ardor. Beyond question, he told her he was sadly misunderstood. She must have believed him. He was married again and lived out his years in comparative obscurity, but at ease, which is the way of the wicked world.

How simple it would have been if only dear Grace had hauled out her revolver and punctured David when he stole that first kiss in the Y. M. C. A.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